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ONE THIRD OF A BILL

Five Short Canadian Plays

WITHDRAWN

- ☐ DESELECTED
- ☐ LOST
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- ☐ OTHER

ONE
THIRD OF A BILL

FIVE SHORT CANADIAN PLAYS

BY
FRED JACOB



THE MACMILLAN COMPANY OF CANADA LIMITED,
AT ST. MARTIN'S HOUSE TORONTO

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PREFACE

After writing about the theatre for much more than a decade—very nearly a generation—I came across one of my own ideas that struck me as new. Surely it is not egotistical to lay claim to a single original idea in a generation. My inclination was to hug it fondly and to give it periodic airings in private discussions, but my friends did not encourage self-satisfaction. To them it did not seem worth the mental effort required to become a father. Still, the poor thing is my own.

I believe that I have hit upon an explanation why bills of one-act plays are seldom successful. It is a matter of common knowledge that they do not enjoy prosperity—that being the only reason for the generosity of the commercial producers who permit the community groups to have the presentation of one-act plays entirely to themselves, as their undisputed dramatic field. And yet some of the best plays in our language have been written in one act.

Why is it that even three short masterpieces will not interest the theatre-going public, at least not in large numbers? What does the public want in an evening of dramatic offerings that a bill of one-act plays does not offer? It seems to me that they desire some form of continuity and sustained interest. You go to see short plays, and three or four times in the course of an evening you have a beginning, a middle and an end. Smith wrote the first one, a thriller; and when the thrills are finished,

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so much for Smith. Now comes Jones with a piece of comedy,—let us see what Jones can do. After Jones, you experience another let-down of interest while you are awaiting Robinson. Who is Robinson anyway? You came on account of Smith and Jones, and it is rather a bore to have the unknown Robinson added. At best, the impression that remains is choppy.

If the trouble with bills of one-act plays is that they are polyglot, wouldn't it be a remedy to make up a programme from the works of one dramatist? If you must have a thread of sustained interest, let it be supplied by the personality of the author. The evening belongs to one man. Let us see how he does this, that and the other.

The immediate objection is that the bill would suffer from sameness, the average dramatist working in but a single mood,—an evening with Lord Dunsany, mildly mystical; an evening with Eugene O'Neill, three plays of hope collapsing and banners dragged in the dust. But monotony would not be inevitable; everybody remembers Sir James Barrie's three war plays that travelled together as one entertainment. They were all in one key without being too much of it. But I am not urging a common subject for a group of one-act dramas; my point is that dramatists should aim to furnish contrasted moods in their plays, so as to make balanced bills.

When a composer writes a symphony, you get one personality expressing itself in different moods. The

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Allegro movement is followed by the Largo, and then by way of variation comes the Scherzo, with a fourth movement that changes again. My idea is that dramatists should write one-act plays in the same way, not one man do the Allegro, another the Largo and a third the Scherzo. The parallel of the symphony and the bill of one-act plays cannot be carried too far, as many symphonies are more like four-act dramas. But it indicates roughly the thing that has always been lacking in collections of one-act plays by different authors, and that is a thread of sustained interest.

My aim when I began to write these one-act plays was to have them sufficiently varied to be placed together in a single bill. In my dramatic symphony, "The Basket", was to be the opening Allegro, with "And They Met Again" as the Scherzo, and "Autumn Blooming" as the concluding Largo. Unlike the orchestral symphony, the bill could be varied. I thought there would be sufficient contrast if it opened with "The Clever One", followed by "The Basket", with "Man's World" as the final movement. I endeavoured to have the moods differ sufficiently to avoid monotony.

Now you have before you the nearest thing to a constructive suggestion that has originated with me since I commenced jotting down comments on plays and players. Perhaps you will sniff and pass it by. Perhaps you will do something still more deadly—tell me of some one who advocated the same thing. Then I shall join forces with him in urging some writer of recognized

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ability who specializes in one-act plays to try his hand at a symphonic bill in three contrasted movements.

Do not misunderstand the purpose of this preface. I am not trying to elbow my way into the community theatre with a demand for seats for my entire family. But I want to seize this opportunity to explain the idea that I hope my plays will illustrate. If anybody takes a fancy to one of them for presentation purposes, I feel sure that I, like any playwright to whom a producer bows, should feel duly gratified. My vanity lies exposed and easy to tickle. To have one play, long or short, wanted at a time is about as much as most would-be dramatists can hope for. And that is the reason why I have entitled my book "One Third of a Bill".

F. J.

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AUTUMN BLOOMING

A Domestic Comedy in One Act

CHARACTERS:

MRS. SPILLER.

ROBERT SPILLER, Her elder son.

SKELTON SPILLER, Her younger son.

GERALDINE MOCKRIDGE, Her married daughter.

MISS PURDY, Mrs. Spiller's neighbour.

JANET, Mrs. Spiller's maid.

*First produced by the Arts and Letters Club Players,
Toronto, February 6th, 1924, with the
following cast:*

MRS. SPILLER	-	-	-	Ann Carew
ROBERT SPILLER	-	-	-	Ivor Lewis
SKELTON SPILLER	-	-	-	Charles Thompson
GERALDINE MOCKRIDGE	-	-	-	Jeanette Thompson
MISS PURDY	-	-	-	Norah M. Holland
JANET	-	-	-	Constance Charlesworth

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Scene.—Living room in Mrs. Spiller's house. It is furnished with old-fashioned furniture, evidently purchased while Queen Victoria was alive. There are even a few surviving horse-hair chairs. The room is dingy and yet home-like. There is one door, to the left, leading into a hall, and at the back is a bay window, overlooking a tangled garden.

Time.—The month of September.

Mrs. Spiller and Janet are discovered when the curtain rises. There is late afternoon Autumn sunlight outside the window, brightening the room. Mrs. Spiller is seated by a table in the centre of the room, doing crochet work. Janet is standing where she can look into the garden.

Mrs. Spiller is a woman in her fifties, bright and kindly, but rather subdued, as though life had gone over her a little heavily, but without destroying a naturally happy and hopeful disposition.

Janet is a matter-of-fact young woman in her thirties.

Janet (gazing down the garden).—There is that little woman again.

Mrs. Spiller (peering).—Where?

Janet (pointing).—Down by the blossoming apple tree . . . I wonder what she thinks she is doing, skipping about like that.

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Mrs. Spiller.—She expects me to come out, on such a nice afternoon.

Janet.—You might just as well have been out there too, Mrs. Spiller. We are not going to get many more September days like this one.

Mrs. Spiller (resigned, sitting back to her work).—But the children told me that they would be over about two o'clock, and that it was very important.

Janet.—Well, it is past four thirty now, and the importance of their business doesn't seem to have hurried them much.

Mrs. Spiller.—I knew they would be late. They are never punctual you know, Janet.

Janet.—Never, when it is you that they are inconveniencing. You have always spoiled your family, I say, Mrs. Spiller.

Mrs. Spiller.—Mothers get a lot of pleasure out of spoiling their children. You'll find that out some day, my dear.

Janet.—It is not so bad when the children grow up to appreciate that they have had an indulgent mother.

Mrs. Spiller.—Mine do, I'm sure.

Janet.—They give no signs of it that I can see.

Mrs. Spiller (a little nettled and on her dignity).—You are always hard on them. They have a great many interests, you know. And our time is all our own.

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Janet (in a tone of finality).—Well, I hope they will never look to you like they look to me.

Mrs. Spiller (pointing through the window).—Look, Janet, look. What is Miss Purdy doing now?

Janet.—It is positively weird the way that old thing skips about (*looking and shaking her head*). I think it is uncanny enough having an old apple tree blossoming in September, without Miss Purdy dancing round it like a witch.

Mrs. Spiller.—I shouldn't call the blossoming of a tree uncanny. It is too beautiful, even if it is unseasonable.

Janet.—Unseasonable! . . . It's against nature and anything that's against nature is uncanny. I've lived near orchards all my life, and I never before saw an apple tree blossom in September. It must be an omen.

Mrs. Spiller.—A good omen, my dear, a good omen, I'm sure, for your wedding.

Janet.—Did you ever see an apple tree blossom in the Autumn before?

Mrs. Spiller.—Why shouldn't it, when it didn't blossom in May? Do you know, when I come to think of it, that tree grew from a seedling and it has never blossomed before. If we had been taking proper care of the garden we should have chopped it down years ago.

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Janet.—Even if you object to me calling the tree uncanny, you can't contradict me when I say Miss Purdy is weird.

Mrs. Spiller (going to the window).—Whatever is she up to?

Janet.—Standing up there on a bench, making monkey faces among the branches. The woman's daft.

Mrs. Spiller (reprovingly).—She is a very clever woman, Janet. That's why she does queer things. Dull people, like us, cannot always understand her.

Janet.—I should say not. Now she's down again, and hopping about with her hands full of blossoms.

Mrs. Spiller.—That's what they call aesthetic dancing.

Janet.—That capering? (*She utters the words with blighting contempt.*)

Mrs. Spiller.—Oh, I must call her (*raising the window*). Miss Purdy. (*She pauses and then calls again*). Miss Purdy, come over and see me (*quite excited*). Janet, go and let her in.

Janet.—She's a daffy creature and no mistake.

Exit Janet.

Mrs. Spiller returns to her chair and her work.

Janet re-enters with Miss Purdy.

Miss Purdy is a woman about Mrs. Spiller's age, obviously a spinster, very dowdy in home-made clothes, but happy and eager in her manner.

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Miss Purdy (advancing breathlessly).—Oh, my dear, how could you stay inside on an afternoon like this?

Mrs. Spiller.—It wasn't because I wanted to. I envied you. Janet and I have been watching you for the last half hour.

Miss Purdy.—Did you think I was foolish?

Mrs. Spiller.—Janet did.

Miss Purdy.—Janet would.

Mrs. Spiller.—Whatever were you up to?

Miss Purdy.—I was trying to feel just like Puck might feel if he had made a tree blossom out of season.

Mrs. Spiller (not quite understanding, but deeply interested).—That's why you were capering, as Janet put it.

Miss Purdy (sitting down).—I guess it is easier to feel like Puck than to look like Puck when you get to be my age.

Mrs. Spiller.—You mustn't mind Janet. She has no imagination.

Janet (who does not wish to conceal her disapproval of such goings-on).—If I may say so, Miss Purdy, you looked more like a silly old woman who had been stung by a wasp.

Mrs. Spiller (fearful lest Miss Purdy will be offended).
—Janet!

Miss Purdy (amused).—That's fine, Janet . . . Of course you have an imagination. How did you think of that? Have you ever really seen an old woman stung by a wasp?

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Janet.—I can't say that I have.

Miss Purdy.—Then you have a wonderful imagination after all. May I use that joke some time as though it was my own?

Janet.—If it is any use to you . . . But I can't see why you should want to look like a puck. Whatever has a blossoming apple tree got to do with a game of hockey? (*The last sentence is launched like a parting shot.*)

Exit Janet.

Miss Purdy.—I just love Janet, Mrs. Spiller. I wish she didn't disapprove of me. She doesn't know the fun I get trying to feel like something that I ain't. Do you know that I have even felt like the devil?

Mrs. Spiller (shocked).—Oh, Miss Purdy.

Miss Purdy.—Not like you mean, Mrs. Spiller. One evening after a storm, on the heights of Quebec, looking away up there towards the mountains and the clouds, I suddenly knew just what Satan felt peering up from the abyss.

Mrs. Spiller (shaking her head over the thought).—I have never been to Quebec or any place else outside of this city. Perhaps that is why I do not imagine things.

Miss Purdy.—I can imagine things without going away. Every morning when I look out of my window to see what sort of a day it is, I waggle my head and feel . . . oh, I wouldn't dare tell you what I feel like.

Mrs. Spiller.—Oh do.

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Miss Purdy.—I think I am Jezebel. You know how she attired her head and looked from her window.

Mrs. Spiller (intensely amused).—You ought to tell Janet that.

Miss Purdy.—Once I even said, "Who is on my side, who?"

Mrs. Spiller.—But it wasn't Jezebel who said that.

Miss Purdy.—It doesn't matter. When I was Jezebel I said that. Then suddenly I saw the milkman down below, and he says, "I always come in on this side, ma'am."

Mrs. Spiller.—How do you do it? Even when you are only living back there in Aunt Fanny's cottage, interesting things happen to you.

Miss Purdy.—They would happen to you too, if you'd go out and look for them.

Mrs. Spiller (wistfully).—I've always wanted to, but I wouldn't dare. Oh, Miss Purdy, I am not like you.

Miss Purdy.—How do you mean, not like me?

Mrs. Spiller.—You have had such a wonderful time all your life.

Miss Purdy.—But I've had to scratch for it. I have had to earn every cent I ever spent on myself. That's why there are so many things I have never been able to do. I haven't seen a fraction of the interesting places in the world.

Mrs. Spiller.—I suppose you wonder why I just stay on here when I have money.

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Miss Purdy.—How long have you been here?

Mrs. Spiller.—Nearly forty years. I came here when I married and I was only eighteen.

Miss Purdy.—And here you have always stayed?

Mrs. Spiller.—Mr. Spiller was only a small farmer. We were three miles outside the city limits then. It was a good many years before the city reached out to us.

Miss Purdy.—And took your little farm into its rich embrace.

Mrs. Spiller.—What a nice way to put it. I must tell Robert. It was Robert, you know, who laid out all the streets on our farm. He is a splendid business man. My husband didn't know much about anything but farming.

Miss Purdy.—I have heard it said that there are not many pennies rolling past that Robert Spiller's foot doesn't land on.

Mrs. Spiller.—Yes indeed, my Robert's shrewd. But he's got sentiment too. He's never touched the old house, and aunt Fanny's little place down there behind it.

Miss Purdy (not much impressed).—After all, it is your home.

Mrs. Spiller.—Yes, and I love it. When you have lived in a place for nearly forty years, somehow you do not want to go very far away from it.

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Miss Purdy.—I shouldn't want to feel that way about any half acre when there is a whole world to be seen.

Enter Geraldine Mockridge. She is a well dressed and rather domineering young woman.

Geraldine (going over and kissing Mrs. Spiller).—How are you, mamma? *(After the first glance, she ignores Miss Purdy completely.)*

Mrs. Spiller.—I began to think that you had all forgotten to come.

Geraldine (looking round).—Aren't the boys here yet?

Mrs. Spiller.—No, you're the first, dear.

Geraldine (crossly).—That's too bad of them. They never consider anybody.

Mrs. Spiller.—They're sure to be here in a few minutes now.

Geraldine.—It's most annoying. It's Martha's afternoon out and the children must have their tea by six-thirty, so I can't wait long.

Mrs. Spiller.—Didn't you see Miss Purdy?

Geraldine (rudely).—I have never met Miss Purdy How do you do By the way, did you know, mamma, that the boys want to talk business?

Miss Purdy (taking the hint).—I ran in just for a moment to keep your mother company while she was waiting. I'll trot into the garden again. Good-bye.

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Exit Miss Purdy, hurriedly, for Geraldine has made her feel quite uncomfortable.

Geraldine.—What a queer, sloppy little creature.

Mrs. Spiller.—Hush, Geraldine. She'll hear you.

Geraldine.—She can't (*going to the window*). There she goes. What on earth is she up to? She acts as though she was not all there. I hope you don't have her over here much.

Mrs. Spiller.—Not all there? Why Geraldine dear, she writes for magazines and papers, little bedtime stories and such-like things . . . She couldn't do that if she wasn't clever.

Geraldine.—That's why she affects eccentricity.

Mrs. Spiller.—She doesn't care how she looks. That's a fact. She saves her money and when she gets enough together she takes a trip. She's been most every place in the world at one time or another.

Geraldine.—A miserably selfish sort of life, I call it, just living for herself. It's not womanly.

Mrs. Spiller.—What else could she do?

Geraldine.—I wouldn't give one of my babies for all her trips round the world.

Mrs. Spiller.—It's no use throwing that up against her. How could she have a home and babies? She hasn't even got a husband.

Geraldine.—That's why I say she's selfish.

Mrs. Spiller.—Anyway, I hope she'll stay here as my neighbour for a long, long time.

Enter Robert and Skelton Spiller.

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Robert Spiller is a shrewd business man, with a hard direct manner. Skelton Spiller is better dressed, more polished and has a worldly affectation.

Skelton.—Here we are, mater.

Mrs. Spiller.—Kiss me, boys. (*They kiss her.*)

Geraldine.—And high time you were here too. I thought you told me to come at two o'clock.

Robert.—So I did, Sis, but Skelton was to call for me in his car. He didn't arrive until after four o'clock.

Geraldine.—You boys never consider anybody's convenience but your own.

Mrs. Spiller.—But Geraldine dear, if they had been here sharp on time, think how long they would have had to wait for you.

Skelton.—You need not have told us that, mater. I knew as soon as Gerry began to talk that she had only been here a few minutes. She is always most aggrieved when she has been nearly caught out herself.

Geraldine (lamely, but determined to retort).—I could have been here an hour sooner, but I knew how it would be when Skelton was coming And I have my children to think of.

Skelton.—Never in the wrong, eh, my dear Gerry. (*To his mother, but aimed at Geraldine*) What makes your daughter so self-righteous, mater? You were never like that.

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Mrs. Spiller (trying to avert the threatened storm).—

You shouldn't speak of Geraldine that way, as my daughter, Skelton dear. She is as much your sister as she is my daughter.

Skelton.—But she's not like either of us, mother. You and I have our little sins.

Geraldine.—You can be a beast, Skelton.

Robert.—You two cut out your bickering. We're here on business.

Geraldine.—The sooner we can get everything settled the better. I've had enough of Skelton's nasty tongue already. And I'm sure you have too, Bob.

Skelton.—You can't drag Bob into this. We get along bravely.

Robert (suddenly yielding to the family desire to be nasty).—Even though you don't think much of Sarah and me socially.

Skelton.—No, Bob, I'm not a snob . . . I'm quite proud of you, except when people say that you're a bit of a shark in the business world.

Robert.—You don't mind taking any money that the shark can bite off for you, I notice.

Mrs. Spiller.—Children, children, you don't come to see me so very often. Can't you make it a pleasant evening. Janet is getting us some tea. (*She speaks, as mothers do, as though they were very small children.*)

Geraldine.—I told you I cannot stay, mamma.

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Mrs. Spiller.—When I heard you were coming, I thought you were planning a little party for me.

Skelton.—We are a mean crowd . . . But we'll have a party another day.

Robert.—This is a piece of business that will have to be settled.

Geraldine.—Yes, Bob will tell you what it is. Go on, Bob.

Skelton.—Always the dirty work for dear old Bob.

Mrs. Spiller (curious).—The dirty work?

Robert.—Skelton should not have put it that way.

Skelton.—Mother is not going to be tickled to death when she hears the news. I can tell you that.

Mrs. Spiller (anxiously).—My dear children, what is the matter?

Robert.—It all comes from Janet getting married.

Mrs. Spiller.—What of that?

Robert.—We thought it would be a good time for you to give up the old house.

Mrs. Spiller.—But what made you think I want to give it up?

Geraldine.—I have got a nice furnished flat for you, much more comfortable than this old ramshackle—

Mrs. Spiller.—But why should I leave here? I can get some one to take Janet's place.

Geraldine.—Maids are not so easy to find . . . I have always felt, mamma, that you should have let me have Janet.

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Skelton.—What makes you think that Janet would want to help bring up your litter?

Geraldine (bitingly).—If you can't refrain from vulgarity, why speak at all?

Mrs. Spiller (pleadingly).—But Bob dear, I love it here.

Geraldine.—It worries us to think that you should be here, in this lonely place, without any proper comforts around you.

Robert.—Geraldine is trying to suggest that we are thinking only of you. But I may just as well put the matter clearly. Dad's will left things in a pretty queer shape for us three, though we never mentioned it to you before, mother. All his ready money was invested and remains locked away to provide your income.

Geraldine.—And you must remember, mamma, that it was Bob who handled the farm so as to make the money. Father would have sold it for a lump sum and received about half its value. It really was not fair of him. We must consider what is just.

Skelton.—Soft pedal the pious stuff, Gerry, do.

Robert (impatiently).—Who is explaining this matter?

Skelton.—Go on.

Robert (spreading out plans of the place on the table for his mother to see, though she does not take them in).—The only available money for the three of us will be what we can get for this land. There are 150 feet on this street and 150 feet on the

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next over, with Aunt Fanny's cottage. It is worth \$30,000 and that is too much to keep tied up.

Geraldine.—And we have waited patiently a good many years, mamma.

Robert.—And this is just the right moment to sell. Things will never be better round here.

Mrs. Spiller (distressed).—But you are not going to turn dear Miss Purdy out of Aunt Fanny's house?

Robert.—Why not? She has been lucky to get it for the past five years for half the cost of the taxes on the land.

Mrs. Spiller.—No one else would live in the house.

Robert.—Yes, mother, and you must realize that we have only kept it out of sentiment.

Skelton.—To say nothing of waiting until the market was at its peak.

Mrs. Spiller.—How will Miss Purdy be able to save money to travel? And she and I have been so happy here.

Geraldine (impatiently, and still strong for justice).—She has no moral claim to the place, mamma. As Bob says, she was lucky to get it for five years.

Mrs. Spiller (greatly disturbed).—Oh, children, children, you do not come near me for weeks, and then you rush in with a proposal like this.

Geraldine.—You mustn't think only of yourself, mamma. Father has been dead for seven years, and we have had almost nothing from the estate.

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Robert.—And it is all the money we are to get from the farm until—

Skelton.—Shut up, Bob.

Robert.—Well, it is all we can get for the present. Surely it is not too much to ask when we are arranging things to make you perfectly comfortable.

Mrs. Spiller (getting up).—At least, I must tell Miss Purdy. She has a right to know.

Robert.—There is plenty of time for that.

Mrs. Spiller (looking through the window).—But there she is now, out there in the garden.

Geraldine.—What does that funny old thing matter?

Mrs. Spiller.—Oh indeed, indeed I must tell her.

Exit Mrs. Spiller, greatly agitated.

Skelton (contemptuously).—I must say that you two are pretty crude.

Robert.—You'll take your share fast enough. After all, it is plain common sense.

Geraldine.—And what would you have us do?

Skelton.—Folks must live. That's why we do most of the crude things.

Geraldine.—Wasn't it like mamma to go chasing off to tell Miss Purdy? As if she mattered!

Skelton.—Who is this Miss Purdy?

Geraldine.—Oh, she writes for magazines and papers and so on, and looks the part. I suppose she calls herself "Prinking Pansy" or something of that sort.

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Skelton.—Not Amelia Purdy Why didn't you tell me the name of our tenant, Bob? . . . Flora would have been chasing over at the double-quick if she had known that mother was chumming with a near-celebrity.

Geraldine (*with a sarcastic laugh*).—You don't call her a celebrity.

Skelton.—Any sort of a celebrity tickles Flora.

Robert.—It doesn't matter about her, but mother rushed off before we had time to speak about the government bonds.

Geraldine.—Yes. I was thinking of that, but I didn't know exactly what to say.

Skelton.—What Government bonds? You two are full of surprises.

Robert.—Father gave her twenty-five thousand dollars worth of bonds. They do not figure in the estate, but are just lying in the safety vault. It seems to us that as mother has the income from everything else, and she can't possibly use it all, living as quietly as she does, she might let us have the bonds.

Skelton.—I wash my hands of that.

Geraldine.—Now who is striking pious attitudes?

Skelton.—Oh, I admit that the ten thousand from the land will suit me for the present.

Geraldine.—With all Flora's money, you can afford to be generous.

Skelton.—I'm not denying that.

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Geraldine.—There is no reason why mamma should act like a martyr. The flat is a more suitable place for her, and she can take the Purdy woman to board if she likes.

Robert.—I was going to suggest that mother should spend more of her time with us.

Geraldine (hesitatingly).—Yes, of course . . . although it is not a very good thing for children to have a grandmother in the house.

Skelton.—I suppose that excuse for getting rid of mother salves your conscience perfectly, Gerry?

Geraldine.—I have never noticed that she stays so much with you.

Skelton.—Mother always seems ill at ease when Flora is entertaining.

Robert.—Which is most of the time.

Geraldine.—And I suppose that excuse for getting rid of mamma salves your conscience perfectly, Skelton?

Skelton.—That leaves only Robert's place.

Robert.—Those are minor details that we can discuss later. I have already advertised the land in to-night's paper. (*He takes out a newspaper.*)

Skelton (reaching for the paper).—May I see? Where? Here (*in mock horror*) Geraldine, look what we have got in the family now.

Robert (nettled).—What is wrong?

Skelton.—Isn't it God-awful? Robert has become a realtor.

Geraldine.—What is wrong with that?

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Skelton.—A realtor!

Robert.—There is more class to that than to the old name, real estate agent.

Skelton.—I have always wondered what a man would look like who calls himself a realtor. . . . Flora will die when she hears this.

Robert.—I don't care a damn what Flora thinks.

Geraldine.—I wish that Skelton would stick to the subject under discussion. We shall never get this matter settled.

Enter Mrs. Spiller.

Skelton (*going to her with a certain amount of tenderness*).—Why old lady, I believe you have been crying. I didn't think you cared so much about this old house. I used to hear you say you would like to get away from it.

Mrs. Spiller.—I have been crying because I was making up my mind.

Skelton.—I'm commencing to think that your children are swine.

Mrs. Spiller.—You see, Skelton, I never made up my mind before in my life. It was quite a strain.

Geraldine.—Now mamma, you must not be unreasonable.

Skelton (*to Geraldine*).—Don't you think that a woman ever makes up her mind except to be unreasonable?

Robert.—We are going to do the right thing by you, mother. Try to look at it our way.

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Mrs. Spiller.—Oh, I won't keep the house from you.
You can sell it as soon as you like.

Robert.—That's sensible. You will be well looked after.

Mrs. Spiller.—Yes, there are lots of things that my money would buy that I have never had, up to now.

Geraldine.—What do you mean, mamma? What notion have you got into your head now?

Mrs. Spiller (making a delighted announcement).—I'm going to see the world. Miss Purdy has often suggested it, but I seemed to have taken root Now there is no reason why I should keep on sitting still. I am going to get Miss Purdy to take me to the South of France next Winter. She says it is the most beautiful spot in the whole world. Next Summer I shall go west and see and see Lake Louise. You know how I have always wanted to see Lake Louise.

Geraldine.—Why, mamma, I never heard of such a thing.

Mrs. Spiller.—Yes, you did. You heard of such a thing just now.

Robert.—That costs a lot of money.

Mrs. Spiller.—Haven't I a pretty good income? Janet has often told me that there is no sense in saving it.

Geraldine (seeing her mother's savings which would have been left to the family melting away).—You wouldn't be so selfish, mamma.

AUTUMN BLOOMING

Mrs. Spiller.—And if that isn't enough, I have twenty five thousand dollars in Government Bonds. They'll go a long way.

Geraldine.—But you told us yourself that Miss Purdy could not pay much rent. How could she afford such trips?

Mrs. Spiller (with another inspiration).—She'll go as my guest. Yes, I'll take her as my guest. I never had the fun of doing anything like that in all my life.

Skelton (highly amused).—Good for you, mater. Gerry was spending that twenty five thousand on her brats not ten minutes ago.

Robert (sharply).—Wait a moment. I know perfectly well that you are not in earnest, mother. You wouldn't think seriously of such an undertaking at your age.

Mrs. Spiller.—It won't be an undertaking with Miss Purdy. She is used to travelling.

Geraldine (plaintively).—But mamma dear, I think you might consider us.

Mrs. Spiller.—That's just it. I have spent my whole life considering you and now it is time for a change. Your father was a good man, but he was hard and narrow. A woman's sphere was her home, he said, so I came here when I married, and here I have stayed for nigh two score years. It was dull enough at times, but I did my duty and drudged along.

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Geraldine.—Plenty of people envied you your husband and your home.

Mrs. Spiller.—But they never knew how many things I wanted to do and never got the chance. I always wanted to see Quebec, and I might have died without seeing it. I've had a narrow escape.

Geraldine.—That's not a nice way to talk, mamma.

Mrs. Spiller.—I am only telling you. I spoiled your father by doing everything he said. Then I spoiled you children. Because I had missed so much, I tried to give you everything you wanted. . . . I thought I was making you happy, and you only turned out to be quarrelsome. I never knew a family that quarrelled so, except your father's sisters and brothers . . . I have spent years and years trying to keep peace. I suppose you think that was fun enough for me.

Skelton.—You're right, mother. But you should not have had two such impossible children as Robert and Geraldine.

Mrs. Spiller.—It has been no better since you married. There are no compensations for me in your homes. It has been nice and quiet here. But when I go to Geraldine's, I am only a nurse girl, and if the children exhibit any bad habits, I am blamed. It is because I have spoiled them. It seems that Geraldine's children would be perfect if outsiders did not spoil them.

Geraldine.—Oh, mamma, how can you say that?

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Mrs. Spiller.—Anyway I brought up one family and that is enough. It's not much better at your place, Skelton. I don't fit into Flora's social events. They make me feel like a kitchen wench.

Robert.—Sarah always makes you welcome, mother.

Mrs. Spiller.—Oh yes, Sarah is good to me. But I grow weary of her bitter tongue. Always picking people to pieces, Sarah is. I don't mind telling Geraldine and Skelton their faults myself. I am their mother. But I don't want to hear them recounted by Sarah all day long.

Robert (grimly).—I'll soon put a stop to that.

Mrs. Spiller.—That won't help now. I was contented enough so long as I had this house with Janet, and Miss Purdy for my neighbour . . . You can have the house, but I'll have Miss Purdy. (*The last sentence is uttered with finality.*)

Geraldine.—We must not act hastily. We'll arrange a little trip for you, mamma. Let's talk it all over quite sensibly.

Mrs. Spiller.—No. There is nothing to talk over. My mind is made up. I have never felt so excited about anything, not in all my life.

As she walks from the room, leaving them all flat, she is like a new creature, years younger than when she sat waiting patiently for her children. It is quite evident that it would be useless to oppose her.

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Skelton.—This is the funniest thing that ever happened in our sober old house.

Geraldine.—I never thought mamma could be so selfish.

Skelton.—You think everybody is selfish who does not do things the way that suits you.

Robert.—You two have only got yourselves to thank, with your everlasting jarring. No wonder mother wants to get out of the country.

Geraldine.—It's that Purdy woman. We might have known that it was not a good thing to have mother chumming with one of those unsexed creatures.

Skelton.—I am not so sure that it is not your fault, Bob. You would rush things. You might have waited until after Janet was married, when the mater was commencing to feel lonely.

Geraldine.—With Flora's money, you don't mind waiting. Bob and I are not so happily situated.

Skelton (seeing the humour of it).—Mother ditched us all, in any event. She is going to blow in the Government Bonds, Gerry. Did you get that?

Geraldine.—For heaven's sake don't speak to me again.

Skelton.—I admire her spirit . . . By God, I admire her spirit.

Enter Janet with a branch of apple blossoms.

Janet (holding out the blossoms).—Your mother told me to bring you these.

AUTUMN BLOOMING

Robert.—Apple blossoms!

Skelton.—At this time of the year! I never heard of such a thing.

Janet.—Your mother told me to tell you that they bloomed too late to amount to much, but it is better than not blooming at all.

CURTAIN.

THE CLEVER ONE

A Satiric Trifle in One Act

CHARACTERS:

ORLANDO SPOTTON.

SADIE GARROTT.

MRS. MILDRED WATSON, Sadie's Eldest Sister.

JACK HARPER.

COUSIN LOU (Mrs. Hortop).

THE CLEVER ONE

Scene.—The end of a croquet lawn, at the home of Mrs. Hortop, where her summer boarders entertain themselves. Only two hoops and the finishing post need to be seen on the stage. There is a rustic bench at the back and a rustic chair at one side behind the finishing post. There can also be an exit through a neatly trimmed hedge.

Time.—Early in the forenoon of a July day.

When the curtain rises, Sadie Garrott and Orlando Spotton are found finishing a game of croquet. The balls are close together near the finishing post. It is evident that Sadie has just missed a stroke. She says, "Oh, bother," and moves up stage from her ball.

Orlando.—I might just as well be sure of my two strokes to win.

He roquets Sadie's ball, places his own beside it, and wins the game.

Sadie.—You win for the first time this week. Not so bad for a beginner. Your game is steadily improving.

Orlando (striking an attitude).—I'll soon be the Mercury of the croquet lawn.

Sadie.—Shall we start another game? I have a right to revenge, you know.

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Orlando.—It's getting rather warm. Let's talk for a while. Then we can have one more round.

Sadie.—Most everybody keeps the body fit nowadays. But not many try to keep the brain fit too.

Orlando.—Only a fortnight ago I despised all forms of athletics. (*Takes a swing with his mallet.*) What a shock it would have been to me then if I could have seen myself doing this.

Sadie.—A cigarette, old dear. (*He gave her one.*) Thanks. . . . You had a mistaken angle, Lando. It is not the games that are wrong. It's the dim-wits who play them.

Orlando.—I know the sort you mean. Getting black in the face and tearing every blood vessel loose from the heart in order to reach a certain spot before another fellow. . . . And if you do get there first, what does it matter?

Sadie.—But you are not that sort of an athlete.

Orlando.—I should say not.

Sadie.—And you adore croquet.

Orlando.—Believe me. See—(*He places his mallet against the bench and salaams.*) A devotee worshipping a croquet mallet.

Sadie.—Do you know what your conversion means, Lando? Even those of us who are highly civilized cannot get away from the primitive instincts. We all love the excitement of contest.

Orlando.—O you insidious croquet mallet! I have you in my blood.

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Sadie.—And it has all happened in a week.

Orlando.—Now I know something of the tensity of the fools who go to the races. (*He follows the action as he describes it with dramatic feeling.*) You make your shot Is it straight for the hoop? Yes, it cannot miss. . . . But will it go the distance? It falters It slows up Come on, you yellow ball six inches five inches four inches. It won't make it . . . No No Slower Slower Slower There's a little slope. Great heavens, it accelerates Go on Go on Go on Victory! Through by an inch!

Sadie.—That's it. That's it.

Orlando.—So the exhilaration of contest makes fools of us all.

Sadie.—So it is that the straining athletes, black in the face, are justified.

Orlando.—And yet, not quite. Something in me remains just a little ashamed. I shouldn't want the bunch to know that I have played croquet every morning for a week.

Sadie.—The Ponsonby swims.

Orlando.—Does he?

Sadie.—Yes. He says that the whole great deep exists to anoint him.

Orlando (*delighted at something he would like to have said*).—Oh, I must meet the Ponsonby. Some of our bunch talk a lot about him.

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Sadie.—He'll thrill you. He never says things like other people. He is all fascination. Anyone who knows the Ponsonby would sooner die than not be clever.

Orlando.—Does he quote H. L. Mencken? I never miss a word that Mencken writes.

Sadie.—Oh no. The Ponsonby will tell you what he says to-day Mencken will say to-morrow.

Orlando.—You intrigue me more and more.

Sadie.—In our bunch we stopped being "intrigued" by things nearly three years ago.

Orlando.—Who started to call him *the* Ponsonby?

Sadie.—When you meet him you will realize that it is the natural thing to call him.

Orlando.—That's personality. Isn't it?

Sadie.—I shall always look upon the day that I met the Ponsonby as the day I was born.

Orlando.—Where was it?

Sadie.—At the art school. He took four months at the school to learn all about art. Wasn't it fortunate that I happened to be there? Painting, you know, is to be my career.

Orlando.—Are any other members of your family artists?

Sadie.—Good gracious no. They would be horrified at the very suggestion. They look upon painting as a vice.

Orlando.—But that didn't stop you?

Sadie.—Oh, I had to have a medium for self-expression.

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Orlando.—O flower, you were not born to blush unseen.

Sadie.—You would not laugh if you belonged to a family like mine. They don't like anything that unsettles them, and they think every congenial friend I get is unsettling.

Orlando.—So your sisters don't belong to the bunch.

Sadie.—Why, Lando, I am the only clever member of a hopelessly commonplace family. What's worse, they wanted to make me as dull as themselves.

Orlando.—But Mrs. Hortop—I shouldn't call her dull.

Sadie.—Cousin Lou. Oh, she's a dear. Very ordinary here. (*Tapping her forehead.*) But she's a dear.

Orlando.—She knows how to make her paying guests comfortable.

Sadie.—All the women of our family are good house-keepers, except me. They have a corner on the feminine virtues. Cousin Lou is a better cook than any of them. Father is always boasting about the way she has increased her income by taking summer boarders. That is the sort of thing in a woman that impresses father.

Orlando.—She is very amusing at times with her chatter, too.

Sadie.—With her chatter. That's right—it is chatter. Cousin Lou never had an idea in her life, but she's bright. That's why the family think she has brains. They always call upon Cousin Lou when they want a tangle straightened out. (*She goes to Orlando in a confidential manner.*) I'm not

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supposed to know it. But I am down here to be straightened out myself.

Orlando (trying to put his speeches in a daring form, so as to be worthy of his company).—You gave birth to an idea, and the family want to have it smothered in its infancy?

Sadie.—Something like that. I broke off my engagement last May, and everybody at our place was terribly shocked.

Orlando.—Shocked?

Sadie.—In our family it is supposed to be very dishonourable to break an engagement.

Orlando.—You should have told them that you were just engaged for a pastime . . . Among civilized people, there is quite a difference between being engaged and being engaged to be married.

Sadie.—Mother doesn't know that. She thinks that being engaged is being engaged to be married.

Orlando.—How nineteenth century!

Sadie.—I only got engaged to Jack to be certain to have some one to take me to the dances last Winter. They should be able to see that it was ended in May.

Orlando.—Poor Sadie.

Sadie.—I told them that Jack bores me. But mother says that a good husband should always bore his wife.

Orlando.—They believe bores ought to be encouraged?

Sadie.—In our family, it is considered vulgar to be so clever that stupid people bore you.

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Orlando.—And is Jack as bad as you say?

Sadie.—Wait until you know him. He works in an office, and he is never a minute late. He is proud of his record. And when he is not working, he is punching bags and taking long walks and swelling out his chest expansion. He has never read anything but Rudyard Kipling and the sporting page.

Orlando.—Dear lady, what an escape.

Sadie.—The family doesn't think so. For three months they have nagged me, and now they expect Cousin Lou to patch things up again. That's why she asked me down here last week. I can see through all their little tricks.

Orlando.—That invitation was pre-ordained through all the ages. You met me.

Sadie.—And then, yesterday, she invited Jack down.

Orlando.—That was transparent and tactless enough.

Sadie.—Now you have a line on Cousin Lou. She thinks she has been very subtle. She pretended that it was to prevent a split between the families. Don't you understand what I meant by saying she lacks something here? (*She taps her forehead again.*)

Orlando crosses to the rustic chair, and throws himself down with a mock air of dejection.

Orlando.—Your tale is happiness compared to mine. Behold and pity.

Sadie.—But I didn't tell you that Jack adores me.

Orlando.—And Kathleen worships me.

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Sadie.—Who is Kathleen?

Orlando.—Two years ago we plighted our troth. Kathleen is the sort of girl who plights her troth. Then she went out west to live with her grandmother, and I did not see her again until three weeks ago.

Sadie.—So you are engaged. I am so sorry.

Orlando.—Not half as sorry as I am. I hate to bust a trusting heart, as the poet says.

Sadie.—What is wrong with Kathleen?

Orlando.—I've moved forward a century, and she has moved backward a century. She is the sort of person who believes in things.

Sadie.—Believes in what, for instance?

Orlando.—All sorts of old-fashioned things, home cooking and God and winter flannels.

Enter Jack. He is a healthy and hearty youth.

Jack.—Hello Sadie.

Sadie.—Good morning Jack. Do you know Mr. Spotton?
. . . . (*introducing them*). Mr. Harper. Mr. Spotton.

Jack and Orlando (together in a not too friendly salutation).—How d'ye do.

Jack (expanding his chest).—Oh, Sadie, I have just had the most wonderful tramp.

Sadie.—What, alone?

Jack.—Certainly not. With one of the natives. Cousin Lou introduced us.

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Orlando.—Is she your Cousin Lou too?

Jack.—Not exactly. But all our folks call her Cousin Lou.

Sadie (a little jealous).—Was the native you speak of a girl? Of course it is no business of mine. But was she?

Jack.—*She* was. If you're anxious to know, I'll tell you all about it. I went with Cousin Lou to the water-cress man's, and we met her under the big elms by the main road. Some dirty dog had promised to go for a walk with her, and then forgotten to turn up.

Orlando.—Good heavens. It was Kathleen. She asked me to go for a country tramp this morning, and I forgot.

Jack.—Well, she got the best of the bargain anyway.

Sadie.—Don't be conceited, Jack.

Jack.—She told me that the man she expected was not much of a walker. He hated it and grumbled all the time. Anyway, I was cheerful. She said I was better company.

Orlando.—Surely Kathleen didn't talk me over with an utter stranger?

Jack.—Didn't she though. . . . But I am not an utter stranger any longer.

Orlando.—I thought Kathleen was too old-fashioned a girl to discuss her fiancée's defects.

Jack.—She was old-fashioned enough to get good and

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mad because her fiancée did not keep his engagements.

Sadie.—I know you, Jack. You are just making that all up to be aggravating.

Jack.—Am I? Well, what's more, she said that the man had forgotten her twice inside of a week. She found out afterwards that he had been playing a silly game of silly croquet with a silly girl who makes silly sketches of all the ugly out-houses in the village.

Sadie.—She means me.

Orlando.—You mustn't mind Kathleen. She knows nothing of modern art.

Sadie.—Did she say any more?

Jack.—Not about you. But she said her friend talked a lot about himself and how much cleverer he is than any other man in the whole world.

Orlando.—I didn't think Kathleen could be such a baggage.

Jack.—It ought to comfort you to know that she was not completely crumpled up by your neglect.

Orlando.—I think I'll take in the croquet things.

Orlando picks up the mallets and balls and departs.

Sadie (annoyed).—Why are you always so rude to any congenial friend of mine?

Jack.—Can't I pick out for myself the people I want to be rude to?

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Sadie.—If she doesn't like men who talk about themselves, she shouldn't have gone walking with you I know perfectly well what you told her—how far you can swim, and how fast you can run, and how straight you can shoot, and what loads you can carry.

Jack (a little sheepish).—You always catch me out. You are too clever for me, Sadie.

Sadie.—You might tell my family that.

Jack.—Not on your life. I'm not boasting about that sort of thing.

Sadie.—You remind me of a poem that the Ponsonby wrote. It was about a man who learned to play the bass drum and then grieved all his life because he could not do solo parts.

Jack.—That doesn't fit me. I don't want solo parts.

Sadie.—It would be just the same if you did. The Ponsonby made a beautiful satire of all the one-cylinder brains.

Jack.—I'll tell you something, Sadie. Some day I am going to give the Ponsonby a swat on the jaw.

Sadie.—I shouldn't be surprised. All down the ages, the stupid men have been swatting the clever men on the jaw. It's their only retort.

Jack (sheepish again).—Oh, come on Sadie. Don't let's squabble this way. We are not engaged any more.

Sadie.—Our families are determined to have us make it up.

Jack.—No.

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Sadie.—But I say yes. . . . Why do you think that Cousin Lou invited you down here?

Jack.—Cousin Lou wouldn't play a mean trick like that on a fellow.

Sadie.—You are not very complimentary. But I know father and mother. Also I know why Mildred came on the scene. It is nothing more nor less than a conspiracy against us, I tell you. But I rather fancy that I am too clever for the lot of them, Cousin Lou included.

Jack.—Here they come now.

Enter Cousin Lou and Mildred. Cousin Lou is a middle-aged woman, the possessor of a lot of cheerful common sense. Mildred is a nice sort of ordinary young married woman, though clearly out of patience with Sadie.

Mildred.—Oh, it is you two who have been playing the game of croquet.

Jack.—Not on your life, Milly.

Cousin Lou.—Now that you have hauled me down here, Mildred, what do you want?

Mildred.—Never mind about that now, Cousin Lou.

Cousin Lou.—That's just what I have been telling you all morning, never to mind. (*To Sadie*) Mildred was greatly exercised because you have been playing a game of croquet with a strange man, Sadie.

Mildred.—You shouldn't have said that, Cousin Lou.

Cousin Lou.—Why not? You nearly worried the life

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out of me about it. (*To Sadie*) Didn't you see her? She must have been creeping up and peering at you from every angle.

Sadie (*annoyed*).—She had no right to be spying on me like that.

Mildred.—That's Cousin Lou's nonsense. If I had been really spying I'd have recognized Jack.

Jack.—You're right about the strange man, Milly. You picked a good word when you said "strange".

Cousin Lou.—Oh, I suppose it was Orlando Spotton.

Mildred (*with the hope of withering her sister*).—Another of your congenial friends, Sadie?

Sadie.—You needn't think cleverness is a crime, Milly, just because you are so dull.

Mildred (*exasperated*).—If mamma had known what she was about, when you showed the first sign of cleverness, she would have spanked you well.

Sadie.—She might have done it, only she didn't expect anybody to turn out clever in our family.

Mildred.—So his name is Orlando Spotton.

Cousin Lou.—Yes. And he is a very nice fellow too. Of course, you must make a certain allowance for the son of parents who would call a boy Orlando.

Jack.—That's so, Cousin Lou. (*genially*) I apologize, Sadie, if I was rude to your new beau.

Sadie.—He is not my new beau.

Mildred.—Now, that's mighty fine of you, Jack. I am sorry that Sadie doesn't know a real man when she sees one.

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Sadie.—Who wants to be a judge of real men? I am only interested in artists.

Mildred.—What nonsense you talk, Sadie.

Sadie.—I don't expect you to understand my point of view, Milly. But I intend to do something significant in art one of these days.

Cousin Lou (in that kindly tone that always annoys people).—And there is no reason why you shouldn't, dear, if you feel that way about it.

Mildred (with the same feeling about art that Sadie had about athletics).—And when you have done something significant in art, what of it?

Sadie.—My name would live forever.

Mildred.—Pooh. Nobody that one knows ever makes a name that lives forever.

Sadie.—I said you wouldn't understand.

Jack.—She's over our heads, Milly. The only thing I can claim is that when Sadie is being clever, I know she is being clever. I do admire you Sadie, even when I wonder what in hell you are all about.

Mildred.—Father and mother know that you have a lot of influence with Sadie, Cousin Lou. They hoped you'd talk some sense into her.

Cousin Lou.—What's the use? Sadie sees through the whole pack of us. I'm sure she knows that I'm expected to make her marry Jack.

Jack.—Haven't I something to say in that matter?

Cousin Lou.—I have been wondering about that point myself.

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Mildred.—The way you do blurt out things, Cousin Lou. *Sadie (feeling that it is an occasion for drama).*—Are we back in the fifteenth century that I am to be married without a protest to the man my parents select?

Cousin Lou.—No, my dear Sadie. We are still in the twentieth century. I looked at the calendar this morning.

Mildred.—Now you are making fun of us.

Cousin Lou.—Really, I'm not, my dear. But your mother wrote me, "Do straighten out this tangle, Cousin Lou." And I'm trying to do it to the best of my ability.

Mildred.—I don't see much chance of straightening it out, now that you have told Sadie everything.

Cousin Lou.—But you knew anyway, didn't you, Sadie?

Sadie.—You are a dear old stupid, Cousin Lou, but I love you for it.

Cousin Lou.—You see, Mildred, I am a dear old stupid, and she loves me for it.

Mildred.—Come on, Jack. We might as well have stayed at home.

Jack.—That doesn't go for me, Milly. You should have seen the little queen that Cousin Lou handed to me this morning.

Exit Mildred and Jack together.

Sadie.—Mildred always gets me terribly on edge. I find myself bickering in her stupid way.

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Cousin Lou.—Mildred is all right, if only she did not think it so important to be married and respectable.

Sadie.—The family is going to be disappointed in you, Cousin Lou. It is the first time that you have failed them.

Cousin Lou.—Have I failed them?

Sadie.—Of course you have. Didn't you hear Milly say that you were expected to talk some sense into me?

Cousin Lou (blandly).—Did they really expect that?

Sadie.—Oh, you old dunderhead, Cousin Lou. You are not the least bit diplomatic. You blurt out everything. That's why Milly was so peeved. You gave the whole game away.

Cousin Lou.—And you knew exactly what your parents expected of me?

Sadie.—They thought you would keep on saying cutting things to me until I consented to marry Jack.

Cousin Lou.—Not even to get you married to Jack will I become a wise-crack addict.

Sadie.—Anyway, let me kiss you for messing up everything. (*Sadie kisses Cousin Lou.*)

Cousin Lou (calling).—Mr. Spotton, come here. Mr. Spotton. (*To Sadie*) Do you know that man has been making sheep's eyes in the offing ever since I came out?

Sadie.—Mr. Spotton is not the sort of man who makes sheep's eyes.

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Enter Orlando Spotton.

Cousin Lou.—Oh, come now, Mr. Spotton. Sadie says you don't make sheep's eyes. How clever does a man have to be before he stops making sheep's eyes when he feels spoony.

Sadie.—I think spoony is a perfectly terrible word. It sounds so countrified.

Cousin Lou.—I'm willing to bet that Mr. Spotton came from the country, though he fools himself by thinking that he doesn't show it. Where were you born, Mr. Spotton, Seaforth or Guelph or St. Thomas?

Orlando.—To tell the truth, I came from Proton.

Cousin Lou.—See. Didn't I tell you, Sadie? Why, I have never even heard of such a place. Did you ever hear of Proton? Did anybody ever hear of Proton? You see how unimportant such things are.

Orlando.—I left Proton when I was a very little boy.

Cousin Lou.—I am sure you would. You must tell Sadie all about it, just exactly why you left Proton, while you were still such a very little boy. . . . Do it over a game of croquet. Then you can excuse me.

Exit Cousin Lou.

Orlando.—I don't quite understand Mrs. Hortop.

Sadie.—She doesn't mean anything. She just rambles on.

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Orlando.—Are you quite sure? I thought she was poking fun at us.

Sadie.—She wouldn't do that, if she could. She gabbles away, and she's always putting her foot in things. Quite by accident, she made Mildred look awfully ridiculous a few minutes ago.

Orlando.—You know her better than I do.

Sadie.—Of course I do. Cousin Lou is quite naive. She is one of those persons who clasp their hands and exclaim, "Love is the most wonderful thing in the whole world."

Orlando.—What would she say if you informed her that love is entirely biological?

Sadie.—At least she would not call me coarse minded, like my sisters do when I try to discuss sex ideas.

Orlando.—I suppose they think love is a spiritual emotion.

Sadie.—There is no use telling them that. If it was a spiritual emotion, they could dodge it. Because it is a biological impulse, it is inevitable.

Orlando.—I seem to know your family already. I'm sure they insist that love must be both spiritual and respectable—two things that love can never be.

Sadie.—The one purpose in life of my family is to make love respectable. That's why they want me to marry Jack. All my sisters have made good matches—such nice well-set-up husbands. They look like the men who advertise underwear in the magazines, and they have just about as much to

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say for themselves. When we have a family gathering, oh, you can't think how nice and clean and middle-class it all is.

Orlando.—And they are determined that you will not escape.

Sadie.—Wouldn't it give them a wonderful jolt if I married the Ponsonby?

Orlando.—Why don't you?

Sadie.—I am such an unimportant person when I get with the bunch. The Ponsonby hardly realizes that I exist.

Orlando.—Then I am afraid that you cannot spite the family that way.

Sadie.—But I'll tell you what I could do. (*Looks at him like a hawk about to pounce.*) I could marry you.

Orlando.—Temptress.

Sadie (*delighted with the notion*).—It's a splendid idea. . . . I know the family would just loathe you.

Orlando.—But you have forgotten Kathleen.

Sadie.—What does Kathleen matter? She talks about you behind your back to an utter stranger.

Orlando.—And she made fun of me too.

Sadie.—And she doesn't appreciate your cleverness.

Orlando.—But what if I broke her heart?

Sadie.—Now, don't get sentimental. If love is a biological urge, how can you break her heart?

Orlando.—I believe that I love you, biologically.

Sadie.—Oh, if the family could only hear us talking now.

Orlando.—Do you think that they would understand us?

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Sadie.—I am sure that they wouldn't. . . . And they'd say it was beastly.

Orlando (hesitating).—But you have put me in such a rotten predicament that I feel half inclined—I feel half inclined to slap you.

Sadie.—Then you do love me, biologically. We might as well be engaged, engaged to be married. . . . Biological love always ends in marriage.

Orlando.—But what about Kathleen?

Sadie.—Let Kathleen go—let Kathleen go for a long walk with Jack.

Orlando.—And what will your Cousin Lou say?

Sadie.—It is no use, Lando, you can't dodge biology. . . . and you can't dodge me.

Enter Cousin Lou with croquet mallets and balls for two.

Cousin Lou.—I thought you were going to play another game of croquet.

Sadie.—Cousin Lou, I have got something awfully important to tell you.

Cousin Lou (placing a ball in position).—This is where you start, don't you?

Sadie.—Listen, Cousin Lou. Lando and I are engaged.

Orlando.—Engaged to be married, Mrs. Hortop.

Cousin Lou (looking up).—What, already?

Sadie.—Aren't we priceless?

Cousin Lou.—Priceless. That's the expression. I

THE CLEVER ONE

wouldn't give a penny for the pair of you, right now.

Orlando.—I'm afraid you think me a cad, because of Kathleen.

Cousin Lou.—On second thoughts, I'll take that back. It is all to the good for Kathleen.

Orlando.—Whenever I have been engaged before, the girl has broken it off. Girls feel it is their right, you know.

Cousin Lou.—You needn't worry about Kathleen. She is going down the river for a paddle with Jack to-night.

Orlando.—I must say that she forgets very easily that she is supposed to be engaged to me.

Cousin Lou.—I promised her that I would square it with you. You see, I helped Jack to borrow the Murray's canoe. It is the smartest in the town.

Sadie.—Well Lando, if she is running off like that with Jack, she can't find much fault with you.

Cousin Lou.—I'm sure she won't find fault with anybody. It'll be moonlight on the river to-night.

Enter Mildred.

Mildred.—Sadie, I'm sorry I was rude to you. I want you to come to my room for a chat.

Cousin Lou.—It's too late, Mildred. Sadie is going to marry Mr. Spotton.

Mildred (staggered).—Cousin Lou.

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Cousin Lou.—They are just about to play their betrothal game of croquet.

Mildred.—Surely, Sadie, it isn't true. I wouldn't dare go home to tell mother and the girls such a dreadful thing.

Cousin Lou.—It isn't such a dreadful thing after all, Mildred. Orlando Spotton is a nice young man, or I should not have asked Sadie down here to meet him.

Mildred.—But I heard just a few minutes ago that he is engaged to some one else.

Cousin Lou.—He is engaged to Kathleen. But he is engaged to be married to Sadie. The greater cancels the lesser. Isn't that the way of it, Sadie?

Mildred.—I don't know how I'll ever explain to the family.

Cousin Lou.—Tell them that Sadie has found some one who appreciates her cleverness. Their life together will be one long intellectual treat.

Mildred.—That won't satisfy mother.

Cousin Lou.—Then tell her that it would have been a pity to spoil two households.

Mildred (advancing to shake hands with her brother-in-law to be).—It is rather a facer. But seeing that you are going to be one of the family, I hope you do not think I have been unpardonably rude, Mr. Spotton.

Sadie (correcting her).—Orlando.

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Mildred.—I hope that Sadie won't be as great a trial to you as she has been to us.

Orlando (accepting the proffered hand).—Perhaps you haven't understood Sadie.

Mildred.—Anyway, I have done the best I could for her. I suppose you have been told that we are a dull crowd, and that she's the clever one.

Cousin Lou (almost to herself).—And that's as it may be.

Orlando.—We both go with the same bunch.

Mildred.—And I may as well go home to-morrow. Even Cousin Lou has failed us this time.

Cousin Lou.—Go back and tell your father and mother that everything is going to be all right.

Mildred departs.

Sadie.—Really, Mildred behaved quite well.

Cousin Lou.—People always do behave quite well when there is absolutely nothing else they can do. But aren't you two going to have your round of croquet?

Sadie.—We might as well. Who will commence?

Orlando.—We'll try it on my mallet.

Orlando tosses his mallet to Sadie. She catches it, and they start to measure hands on the handle.

Sadie (stopping suddenly).—No, I won't do it that way. I like you to go through the hoop first, Lando, so that I can roquet you.

ONE THIRD OF A BILL

Orlando.—All right. As you like.

Orlando moves over to position, ready to play the first ball of the game.

Sadie.—It's a wonderful game, Cousin Lou.

Cousin Lou.—What, croquet?

Sadie.—No, the mating game. The love game, you old-fashioned people call it.

Cousin Lou.—In your case, both of them are much the same thing. Lando will always have to go through the hoop first so that you can score a roquet off him.

Orlando (pausing to look doubtfully at Cousin Lou).—And Sadie says that you are as naive as the Babes in the Wood.

Cousin Lou.—Of course she does.

Orlando.—Somehow I suspect that you are a little deeper than she has ever guessed.

Sadie.—Cousin Lou is like the British Empire,—she muddles through.

Cousin Lou.—Sadie will explain me to you. She sees through everybody, you know.

Sadie.—I saw through you all when you tried to marry me off willy nilly. You would have done it too, without a qualm of conscience, if I hadn't been clever enough to check-mate the whole pack of you.

Cousin Lou.—Oh no, Lando, I have no aspirations to rival little Sadie here. You could not have two

THE CLEVER ONE

such clever people in one family. It would not do at all, at all.

Orlando starts to play his first ball, as

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

A FABLE.

THE POEM THAT THE PONSONBY WROTE.

Jemima is the heroine
About whom I shall tell:
Our hero will not fall in line
Until you know her well.

Jemima thought her soaring mind
Above life's dull procession;
She told her friends that she must find
Some mode of self-expression.

She used the patter of the schools,
She learned their words by heart;
And called all men and women fools
Who were not mixed in art.

When Bob the brewer came to woo,
And offered his estate,
She said, "No, Bob, go back and brew;
All such as you I hate.

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"Mere males I cannot tolerate
Since genius I have met,
And I am bound to find a mate
Within the arty set."

She raised her eyes, and there behold
High o'er drab cash and rum,
She saw one Sam, a drummer bold,
Who drummed a big bass drum.

Now Sam had aspirations too;
For he had set his heart
On getting just one chance to do
A little solo part.

Sam crushed no doubts and hid no fears;
He knew that fame must come,
And so he had spent years and years
In mastering his drum.

He shut his ears to friends who joked;
He scoffed at critics' groans;
No drummer ever had evoked
Such blatant forte tones.

And when the puffing band would pass,
The instruments seemed dumb,
So clear above the screaming brass
Rang out the banging drum.

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She told him then how long she had
Loved artists such as he;
He said—his English may seem bad—
“The man you want ain’t me.

“O maiden fair, you must have missed
The meaning of my life;
Till I become a soloist,
My drum must be my wife.”

But I am very glad to state
She neither swooned nor wailed;
She merely sat up very late
And read “The Light that Failed”.

The saddest part I must go through,—
She looked for Bob once more,
And found him with a sweet-heart, whom
We have not met before.

And Sam, I fear, will long aspire;
The time may never come
When music-loving folk desire
A solo on the drum.

MORAL

A moral in these verses lies,
And if it is not plain,
Then reader kindly lift your eyes
And read them through again.

AND THEY MET AGAIN

A Comedy

CHARACTERS:

JOHN BARTLETT, A middle-aged man.

NAN BARTLETT, His wife (played by two actresses)

As she speaks.

As she thinks (described as "herself").

BERT HATFIELD

As he speaks.

As he thinks (described as "himself").

MARTIN, A waiter.

AND THEY MET AGAIN

Scene.—The private dining room of a Country Club.

The stage can be draped with curtains to suggest a room with a door at the back, centre. There is a table with two chairs at it. Behind the chairs are two low seats, like cloth-covered boxes.

When the curtain rises, John Bartlett and Martin are discovered.

Mr. Bartlett.—You can serve afternoon tea for two, Martin, without the couple being disturbed.

Martin.—Yes, sir. There are not many people taking tea indoors this afternoon. It is so warm.

Mr. Bartlett.—That will be fine.

Martin.—Are you bringing your friend right up, Mr. Bartlett?

Mr. Bartlett.—As a matter of fact, I shall not be here at all. I am ordering tea for my wife and a gentleman.

Martin.—Very good, sir.

Mr. Bartlett (hesitates a moment and then speaks suddenly).—Look here, Martin. I am always coming to you for advice, but you are the only man in the city to whom I can tell my private affairs without feeling like a calf.

Martin.—It is because I do not seem like a man to you at all, sir. It is very difficult to talk of intimate

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things man to man. But it is quite another matter to talk man to waiter, as it were.

Mr. Bartlett.—It isn't that. (*positively*) It isn't that. But you have so much more brains than most of the men who belong to this club.

Martin.—That's because they are successful business men. I cannot understand why it is that men with brains are so seldom successful.

Mr. Bartlett.—But I can always bank on your advice.

Martin.—Except in money matters. I have never won even a two dollar bet in my life.

Mr. Bartlett.—When your judgment is perfect every other way, that sort of thing is quite unimportant.

Martin.—Not for me, sir, I can assure you.

Mr. Bartlett.—You know Mr. Hatfield by sight, Martin? He has been at the club a good deal this summer.

Martin.—Oh yes, sir.

Mr. Bartlett.—It turns out that he and my wife were great friends when they were boy and girl. It must have been more than a quarter of a century ago, but of course my wife would not want me to tell you that.

Martin.—Of course not.

Mr. Bartlett.—My wife came here to-day especially to meet him.

Martin.—I hope she did not *show* her disappointment.

Mr. Bartlett.—What makes you think she will be disappointed?

Martin.—They always are, sir.

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Mr. Bartlett.—I suppose you do get a chance from time to time to watch couples who meet again after many years.

Martin.—Yes sir, and mostly they try to pretend it is very pleasant. I always feel quite sorry for them.

Mr. Bartlett.—What's wrong with such meetings? I should think that they would have hundreds of mutual memories to remind one another about.

Martin.—I'll tell you how it seems to me, Mr. Bartlett. The woman feels that she is looking just as she used to look, but the man sees her as she is now . . . and the man feels that he is looking just as he used to look, but the woman sees him as he looks now.

Mr. Bartlett.—That is what the poets call the tragedy of change.

Martin.—Yes, but that's not the worst. He thinks all sorts of things he would like to say, but doesn't dare. And she thinks of all sorts of things she would like to say, but doesn't dare. They don't know what the other is like, you see. So they chatter away and say nothing, and it is all a terrible frost.

Mr. Bartlett.—You are quite a psychologist, Martin, but I'm afraid you are right. I suppose that I had better stay here with them, to let things down easy, so to speak.

Martin.—Certainly not, sir.

Mr. Bartlett (hopefully).—You think not.

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Martin.—If you stay, Mrs. Bartlett will be sure to say afterwards that you made it impossible for them to talk.

Mr. Bartlett (relieved).—That's splendid, Martin. You see, I have been bowling and I want to do some more bowling. I do not care about sitting inside drinking afternoon tea on a hot day.

Martin.—You had better keep away, sir. Then they cannot blame you for taking off the edge of it.

Mr. Bartlett.—I left them looking at the hollyhocks. The hollyhocks are quite wonderful this summer. . . . Oh, there they are.

Enter Mrs. Bartlett and Mr. Hatfield, a conventional middle-aged couple.

Mrs. Bartlett.—You see, Bert, I have a well-trained husband. He has arranged everything.

Mr. Bartlett.—And I hope you will excuse me if I run away. Martin will attend to you.

Mrs. Bartlett (coyly).—You had better be careful, John. Bert and I have been digging up old times. We came near to being sweethearts in the calf-love days.

Mr. Bartlett.—But that was a long, long time ago.

Mrs. Bartlett (bridling).—Not so long as all that.

Mr. Hatfield.—I see you haven't trained Bartlett to be as gallant as I should have been.

Mrs. Bartlett.—I think you had better go back to your bowling, John.

AND THEY MET AGAIN

Exit Mr. Bartlett.

Martin.—This is your table, Mrs. Bartlett.

Mrs. Bartlett (who always speaks with slightly extravagant emphasis).—Oh, Bert, you really must know Martin. He is a priceless person.

Mr. Hatfield.—Bartlett has already introduced me.

Mrs. Bartlett.—John would sooner go to Martin for advice than to any man in our own set.

Martin.—I'd like to be as wise as Mr. Bartlett thinks me.

Mrs. Bartlett.—You must tell Mr. Hatfield about your name.

Martin.—It is a foolish story, Mrs. Bartlett.

Mrs. Bartlett.—I am sure that Mr. Hatfield will think it a priceless story. You know, Bert, that his name is Martin X. Martin.

Mr. Hatfield.—Martin X. Martin? It sounds as though you were intended to be an author.

Martin.—Oh no, sir. My parents would never presume to think that I would be a genius. But there were nine boys in our family, sir, and when I came they were tired of thinking up boys' names, so they just doubled up the Martins.

Mr. Hatfield.—But the X. It must stand for quite an unusual name.

Martin.—It doesn't stand for anything. I was the tenth, and X made the name sort of balance.

Mrs. Bartlett.—Isn't it ingenious?

Mr. Hatfield.—Quite unique.

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Martin.—It worked out much better than father ever dreamed. He did not know that I would come out to Canada and become a waiter. How could he?

Mr. Hatfield.—How could he, indeed?

Martin.—But here I am. You have no idea how many people there are who do not know how to address a waiter. They get quite embarrassed over it. They don't know whether they should use the first name or the last name. But in my case . . . well, you see they don't have to worry at all. . . . Is it tea and toast that you want, sir?

Mr. Hatfield.—How about it, Nan?

Mrs. Bartlett.—Just anything to be sociable.

Exit Martin.

As soon as Martin goes out, a young man and woman appear from the curtains, Himself and Herself. They sit down on the low stools behind Mrs. Bartlett and Mr. Hatfield. Himself looks as youthful as Mr. Hatfield feels, and Herself is as coy as Mrs. Bartlett would like to be. They express the thoughts of Mr. Hatfield and Mrs. Bartlett.

Mrs. Bartlett.—You were telling me about your cousin Clara.

Mr. Hatfield.—Yes. She married a funny old college professor, years older than herself. They went

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off to the States and I haven't heard of them for years.

Mrs. Bartlett.—I am glad to hear that Clara is so happy. She loved books and dry things.

Herself.—I wonder if he thinks I am really interested in his cousin Clara. She never was anything else but a frump, and marrying a college professor served her right.

Mr. Hatfield.—I suppose you know that her brother Will was drowned.

Mrs. Bartlett.—Yes, from a canoe in Muskoka.

Herself.—I wish he would talk about me, and what I used to be like.

Mr. Hatfield.—Just at the threshold of a brilliant career.

Himself.—At least that is what we always say, but I don't know how any of my silly relatives could have had a brilliant career.

Mrs. Bartlett.—It is hard to understand why the best are always taken.

Mr. Hatfield.—Don't let us talk about doleful memories.

Mrs. Bartlett.—Here is Martin with the tea.

Enter Martin.

Mr. Hatfield.—Put it here, please, will you, Martin.

Martin.—Yes sir.

Martin puts down the tray of tea and toast and goes out. The tea is poured. Meanwhile Himself stands up and gazes at Mrs. Bartlett and Herself stands up and gazes at Mr. Hatfield.

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These two persons are sizing up one another. Mr. Hatfield and Mrs. Bartlett start to sip their tea.

Mrs. Bartlett.—When we last parted we little thought that when next we met we'd be blinking at one-another through spectacles.

Mr. Hatfield.—There, I shall not have it that way. I'll take mine off. (*He does so.*)

Mrs. Bartlett.—Does it roll the years back?

Mr. Hatfield.—I didn't need to do that.

Mrs. Bartlett (fishing).—Why?

Mr. Hatfield (gallantly).—You have changed so little. Why, you are the same old Nan. I walked into the club, and there was the girl I used to know.

Mrs. Bartlett (tickled with herself).—That is the loveliest thing I ever heard anybody say.

Himself.—And did you believe me, you old hag?

Mr. Hatfield.—It is odd that I did not know you had married Jack Bartlett. We have had business dealings for several years now.

Mrs. Bartlett.—I am sure Jack knew. I must have mentioned you.

Both sip their tea in a bored manner.

Herself.—This is getting terribly dull. I thought there would be a little romance in meeting Bert again. Has he forgotten some things that I remember?

Mrs. Bartlett (fishing again).—But I suppose he had

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forgotten. He has heard of so many old flames of mine.

Mr. Hatfield.—You used to be a popular girl, Nan.

Himself.—So you have become one of those women who call every man who spoke a kind word to you, “an old flame”.

Mrs. Bartlett.—I’m afraid that I often tease John about how much better I could have done for myself out of all the beaux who wanted me.

Himself.—Silly, I’m afraid you are just silly. But we’ll see.

Mr. Hatfield.—You have told him all about your proposals, of course. But have you told him about your adventures?

Herself.—That sounds more promising . . . Romance!

Mrs. Bartlett.—Why not? Boys and girls were different when we were young from what they are to-day. They are not as nice-minded now as we used to be. Our adventures were so perfectly innocent.

Himself.—I wonder.

Mr. Hatfield.—I suppose you recall the day we went down the river to a picnic, that day we missed the last boat home.

Himself.—I bet you never told John that.

Mrs. Bartlett (with a titter).—I’ll never forget my horror when we got to the top of the hill and saw the steamer leaving the wharf.

Himself.—I’ve always been sure you wanted to miss that boat. I’d like to know what you were up to.

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Mr. Hatfield.—You had told your aunt that we were going back by the early boat. That's how she came to leave us.

Mrs. Bartlett.—And there we were, twenty miles from home, without a chaperon. It was considered quite a predicament in those days.

Herself.—I'm sure you made me miss that boat on purpose. I'd like to know what you were up to.

Mr. Hatfield.—They gave us a terrible supper at that country hotel.

Mrs. Bartlett.—I'll never forget that. Those stale cookies must have been standing on the table for weeks.

Mr. Hatfield.—And yet we enjoyed it. I suppose we were young and romantic.

Herself.—Romantic!

Mr. Hatfield (continuing).—And don't you remember, we began to be frightened when I could not get a buggy to drive us home.

Himself.—I believe you knew perfectly well that I only pretended I couldn't find one.

Mrs. Bartlett.—Yes, I was such a sensitive girlie. Do you recall how I cried and cried? I do not think I ever cried again as I cried that night.

Himself.—Do I recall it? My God, I wondered what I had let myself in for.

Mr. Hatfield.—Do you know that I never realized until then how timid you were?

Mrs. Bartlett.—So you went away and tried again, and an old farmer loaned you his buggy.

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Mr. Hatfield.—I had to walk half a mile up the side lines to get it.

Himself.—And I'd have walked home rather than face that bellowing again.

Mrs. Bartlett.—It was a great relief to me when you came to the door with the horse. As you say, I was a timid wee girly.

Herself.—Of course I knew perfectly well you could get a buggy if I cried enough.

Mr. Hatfield.—That's what we called an adventure in those days. Boys and girls were not nearly so free with one another as they are now.

Herself.—And you were just about as romantic as a cornmeal pudding during that ride home.

Mrs. Bartlett.—Do you want to know what I remember best about that trip?

Mr. Hatfield.—Yes, what was it?

Mrs. Bartlett.—How protecting and chivalrous you were when you came back with the horse.

Mr. Hatfield.—How thoroughly forlorn you looked in that dingy hotel parlour.

Himself.—I was pretty badly scared with you snivelling and snorting on my hands.

Mrs. Bartlett.—You stooped over me as though I was a little child. I trusted you completely.

Herself.—I thought you were going to kiss me. Why didn't you? That's what I wanted.

Himself.—I believe after all that you did expect me to kiss you. But I wasn't taking any more chances.

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Mr. Hatfield.—Your people trusted me, too. They knew I had been well brought-up.

Herself.—Well brought-up! I am afraid that is what made our little romance such a wash-out.

Mrs. Bartlett.—You were a nice boy, Bert, a real nice boy.

Mr. Hatfield.—It was a nasty chapter of accidents.

Mrs. Bartlett.—Not all of it. The ride home along the river road was lovely. I never saw the moon so beautiful.

Mr. Hatfield.—I don't think I cared much about looking at the moon.

Himself.—I was wondering what your father would say when you landed home with your eyes all red from crying.

Mrs. Bartlett.—I remember suggesting that we might stop the horse so as to enjoy the moonlight on the river. Youth and romance, you know.

Mr. Hatfield (playing up to her).—Yes, youth and romance . . . Youth, youth, how you love adventure.

Herself.—You were just as fidgety as an old maid. I had thought it would be more romantic to be left at the mercy of a man.

Mrs. Bartlett.—Well, as the saying is, we are only young once.

Herself.—And it was a pretty tame adventure after all.

They pause and sip their tea. Himself sits down as though ruminating.

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Himself.—I have never been able to understand the way she behaved that night. . . . That ride home. . . . She kept trying to cuddle and I was afraid to put my arm about her for fear she might blubber again.

Mr. Hatfield.—And after all, when we got home, there was nothing said.

Mrs. Bartlett.—They were so busy scolding my poor aunt for leaving us that they never mentioned a word about our carelessness in missing the boat.

Mr. Hatfield.—Your father was very nice to me.

Mrs. Bartlett.—He patted you on the back.

Mr. Hatfield.—And told me that he had complete confidence in me.

Himself.—And yet I believe the old boy had some lingering suspicions all the time. Perhaps he had been there himself.

Mrs. Bartlett.—But parents cannot feel any more as safe as father did. I am afraid that the boys and girls have deteriorated since those days.

Mr. Hatfield.—An adventure like ours would not be so innocent any more.

Mrs. Bartlett.—No indeed. Our minds were quite unsoiled.

Mr. Hatfield.—Young people have grown more sophisticated, so fond of sensations.

Mrs. Bartlett.—Put a modern youth and maiden together in an auto on a lonely road, and they would not

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be thinking of the beauty of the scenery, as we did.

Mr. Hatfield.—It is an unhealthy age that we are living in.

Mrs. Bartlett.—I always say to John that when we were young, we did not eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil until we were married. The new generation toddles to the tree as soon as they can walk.

They both sit back, well pleased with themselves, as they drink their tea, the personification of self-conscious respectability.

Himself and Herself indicate the well-concealed feeling of boredom.

Herself.—I used to tell the family that Bert proved himself the soul of honour that night. But I have always wondered about him, and I guess I shall have to go on wondering.

Himself.—I'd like to know if she was really the sweet, guileless maiden that she thinks she was. It still seems to me that she wanted to miss the boat, though she now appears to forget that it was not exactly an accident. . . . Was she innocent, or was she deep?

Enter Mr. Bartlett.

Mr. Bartlett.—I am sorry to interrupt your gossip, but

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there is a big storm coming up, and Jim Hunter has offered to motor us back to town.

Mrs. Bartlett.—Oh dear, I left all the windows open and the maid is out.

Mr. Bartlett.—Will you come, Hatfield?

Mr. Hatfield.—Thank you, but I have some things to attend to, and I'm leaving for the West, Saturday.

Mrs. Bartlett.—Then I'm not going to see you again. I'm so sorry.

Mr. Hatfield.—It has been delightful to talk over old times, Nan, even for this short hour.

Mr. Bartlett.—I suppose she has been telling you about the children. Nan loves to boast about the children, don't you dear?

Mr. Hatfield.—The children?

Mr. Bartlett.—Surely you've heard about the kiddies.

Mr. Hatfield.—Mrs. Bartlett has been talking about herself.

Mr. Bartlett.—And she hasn't told you that we have five boys and three lovely little girls?

Himself.—Good heavens . . . the rabbit.

Mr. Hatfield.—Why Nan, I did not know.—How, how, how,—beautiful.

Mrs. Bartlett (flustered).—Yes, yes. . . . "These are my jewels," as Venice said.

Mr. Bartlett.—Venus, my dear, Venus. Nan invariably gets Venus and Venice mixed up.

Mr. Hatfield.—You always were a little wild with your quotations, Nan.

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Himself.—I don't believe it was Venus who said, "These are my jewels".

Mrs. Bartlett.—But we won't keep Mr. Hunter waiting.
(*Puts out her hand.*)

Mr. Bartlett (jocularly).—Now you two old flames, you must not make your parting too formal.

Himself.—What the deuce does he expect me to do?

Mr. Hatfield.—You hear what your husband says, Nan?

Herself.—I believe we are going to get a thrill out of this meeting at last.

Mrs. Bartlett.—John loves to embarrass me.

Mr. Bartlett.—Not at all. Don't mind me.

Mr. Hatfield (being respectfully sheikish).—Shall I tell you that your lips are just as enticing as they always were?

Himself.—I wonder how the old boy liked that one. He asked for it.

Mr. Bartlett.—That's right. Flatter the poor old thing.
A mother of eight always loves compliments.

Herself.—I wish he would stop dragging in the children.

Mrs. Bartlett.—Bert does not think of me as the mother of eight, John. He thinks of me as the girl he used to know.

Mr. Hatfield.—That is why there must be more than a handshake at parting.

Mr. Bartlett.—Go to it, old boy.

Mrs. Bartlett.—Oh John, you are so crude.

Himself.—What the devil are the bounds of good taste?

AND THEY MET AGAIN

Mr. Hatfield stoops and kisses Mrs. Bartlett's hand.

Herself.—Is that all?

Mr. Hatfield.—That is my salute to the most fascinating of women.

Mrs. Bartlett.—Take a lesson in gallantry, John.

Mr. Bartlett.—Hatfield, I believe that you are going away envying me my wife.

Himself.—I guess I got out of that without offending either of them.

Herself.—He is thinking of me as the mother of eight.

Mrs. Bartlett.—John likes people to tell him that he is married to a charming wife, don't you dear?

Mr. Bartlett.—What else could they say?

Mrs. Bartlett (pensively).—It is often a little dull being the charming wife of a prosaic husband.

Mr. Bartlett.—And it is often a little nerve-racking being the prosaic husband of a charming wife.

Mr. Hatfield.—But you're a proud and happy husband. I can see that, Bartlett.

Himself.—You're welcome to her, old boy, you're welcome to her.

Mr. Bartlett.—But come along, dear. We're keeping Mr. Hunter.

Bartlett and Hatfield shake hands.

Exit Mr. Bartlett.

Mrs. Bartlett.—You must let us know when you are in the city again.

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Mr. Hatfield.—I'll not forget that.

They shake hands.

Herself.—You poor conventional stick-in-the-mud. After all, I did better for myself with John.

Mrs. Bartlett.—Then it is good-bye for now.

Exit Mrs. Bartlett.

As she does so, Herself disappears through the folds of the curtains.

Mr. Hatfield stands looking after Mrs. Bartlett.

Himself.—A vain old creature. A windbag of foolish sentiment.

Himself disappears through the curtains.

Mr. Hatfield rinses out one of the tea-cups. He takes a silver flask from his pocket and pours a little into the cup. Then he lifts it as though toasting himself.

Mr. Hatfield.—What an escape you had, Bert Hatfield! What an escape!

He drinks as the

CURTAIN FALLS.

MAN'S WORLD

A One Act Comedy in Three Scenes

TO THE MEMORY OF BRITTON B. COOKE

I am dedicating "Man's World" to Britton B. Cooke, partly as a tribute to a friendship, partly as an acknowledgment, because the idea was his. Three months before his death, while the brave spirit was still planning for the future, he wrote me a letter in which he said:—

"I had an idea recently for a bit of comedy that you and I might collaborate on, if you were interested and could spend the necessary time with me. It is very vague yet, but the germ is this: Four or five elderly townsmen—the editor whose life ambition has been to print something that will raise hell, the lawyer, the banker, the Member of Parliament, the registrar and town clerk—have been harried and harassed by the buxom women of the town till there is only one corner where they can in safety meet—to wit, the old editor's office. Here they can still be male,—talk politics without having to stop to explain what it means to the women, tell racy stories if they like, play poker and brag—in other words escape the petticoat and (and there could be some concealed seriousness in this) all that too much petticoat means in North America. The fire-eating editor announces that he is going at last to publish something that will 'raise hell'. I don't yet know exactly what, but he proposes re-asserting the male and his superiority. The end of the thing is to be, say: all of them called home or led off by their wives, except the editor. He remains stormy and indignant and on fire

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with his scheme, when his fat, amiable, foolish old wife comes in, hears him expound, sighs, agrees although she does not understand, but almost unconsciously seduces him from his high (and really fine but inexpedient) purpose by the simple device of rubbing his forehead to cure a head-ache. The curtain descends on the old fire-eater once more cheated of his crusade by his kindly but totally unseeing, ununderstanding wife."

This idea I have adapted in my comedy, which is probably more obvious and undoubtedly less serious in its purpose. Still, I feel that "Man's World" belongs to both of us. If Britton B. Cooke had lived, it would have been done differently. I am convinced that he had powers of imagination and literary gifts that would have made him our outstanding native dramatist. It was as a playwright that he seemed destined to take a permanent place among Canadian writers.

FRED JACOB.

CHARACTERS:

ACRES KETTLEBY, Editor of the town weekly paper.

MARY KETTLEBY, His wife.

BERT PERKINS, Proprietor of the general store.

LOVEY PERKINS, His wife.

GEORGE HOOKER, An insurance agent.

DR. FOSTER.

MRS. SARAH DOTLEIGH HENDERSHOTT, A rich widow.

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Time.—*The month of November.*

Scene.—*The inner office of Acres Kettleby's printing establishment. It is a dingy room that does not look as though it has been accustomed to frequent applications of the broom and duster. There is a window at the back, and the only exit is to the left, through a door into the outer office. There is a desk to the right of the room, and in the centre stands a table, on which is a pile of exchange papers. There are four or five plain chairs scattered about the room. It is evidently a man's resort, with a spittoon or two, ash trays, a white jug and glasses on the desk.*

Scene 1.—*Wednesday, late afternoon.*

When the curtain rises, Acres Kettleby is seated at his desk, writing and greatly interested. He throws away one sheet of paper as though it does not satisfy him. Then writes diligently for a few moments before pausing to think.

Kettleby is a middle-aged man, careless about his dress and inclined to be nervous and impulsive in his actions.

After he has been writing for a minute or two Bert Perkins enters. He is a trifle flashy in his clothes and moves and speaks with the cock-sure manner of a man who has always been a bit of a smarty.

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Perkins.—Hello Kettleby!

Kettleby.—Hello Perkins!

Perkins.—Aren't we going to have a game to-day?

Kettleby (turning round from desk).—Did George get home?

Perkins.—Oh yes. The Hookers arrived this morning. (*Throws hat and overcoat on chair in corner and seats himself.*) Ain't George having a hell of a time since his wife got high-brow?

Kettleby (highly amused).—When first I knew George Hooker, he used to rush off to the burlesque house to buy tickets as soon as he landed in the city. That was his idea of a good show. Now Kate hauls him with her to hear the Beethoven Choir.

Perkins.—It ain't so long since Kate Hooker first heard of Beethoven herself. . . . Where George made his mistake was letting her go to the city for music lessons after they were married.

Kettleby.—When you educate a woman late in life, it always sort of upsets her.

Perkins.—But I don't forget that she was Kitty Williams.

Kettleby.—She's Kate now, and I suppose she will end up by being Catherine.

Perkins (in his knowing manner).—Say, listen, her dad was as tough an old blade as ever lived in this town. I could tell you some pretty ripe ones about old man Williams. He wasn't no high-brow, he wasn't.

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Kettleby.—There were lots of items about him that I never used in the local news.

Perkins.—Do you remember about that Jane who followed him home from the West, all the way from Vancouver?

Kettleby.—As far as that goes, that sort of thing might happen to a high-brow. I've heard that it does, quite frequently.

Perkins (enjoying himself).—That old man knew how to have a good time.

Kettleby.—But we can't hold Kate Hooker's paw against her.

Perkins.—He was her paw as long as he lived. Now she speaks of him as father.

Kettleby (looks into the outer office and then turns back).—Just the same I guess George would have had a better time going to town with old paw Williams than with Kate.

Perkins.—I was in the city with paw Williams once, for the Fair. Talk about painting the town red. I'd no notion you could have so much fun in a week.

Kettleby (with a suggestion of mischief).—Did you ever tell Lovey all about that week?

Perkins.—You bet your sweet life I didn't. Say, listen. The missus has a notion I never went to the big town except to Epworth League Conventions. You ought to hear us when we're going to bed, swapping yarns about Epworth League Conventions. She thinks I'm a wonder.

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Kettleby (rubbing it in).—Say Bert, if Lovey ever finds you out!

Perkins.—What d'ye mean, finds me out?

Kettleby.—You're not quite the innocent she believes.

Perkins (tickled with himself).—Well, as long as she believes it. Ain't I just about all there is over at the church? What more can she want?

Kettleby.—You're some boy, Bert! You're some boy!

They both laugh, as men do when pluming themselves on the knowledge that they are masculine.

Enter George Hooker, an ordinary, smalltown business man.

Hooker.—Hello fellows. What's the joke, Bert?

Perkins.—I wasn't telling a joke. . . . But I have two or three for you, George, fresh from the swill-pail.

Hooker (putting his coat on top of Perkins's).—Ain't the doc here yet?

Kettleby.—Maybe he doesn't know you're home.

Hooker.—Oh yes, he does. I met him on the street at noon.

Perkins.—I bet I know what happened. The Frigate sent him to the shop for a spool of thread. She said (*imitating a prim and masterful woman*) "Now Thomas, you must bring it straight home to me and then you can go over and play with that rowdy Kettleby man."

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All laugh at this sally, which is typical of Bert Perkins.

Hooker.—Do you remember the day the poor little doc told us that?

Kettleby.—It wasn't quite as bad as Bert makes out.

Hooker.—The Frigate certainly runs him round by the nose.

Kettleby.—That reminds me, George—you haven't told us how you and Kate liked the Beethoven Choir.

Hooker (as man to man).—I sat through two concerts. Honest, it was a crime. I never saw so many homely women on one platform in my life. When they opened their mouths, it looked like a long row of caves.

Kettleby.—You should have shut your eyes and kept your ears open.

Hooker.—I should have closed my ears too. It took nearly a bottle of aspirin to cure the head-ache I had this morning.

Kettleby.—In other words, you don't think the Beethoven Choir is so very good.

Hooker.—Honest, fellows, I can't see that they are any better than our own Methodist Choir, except that they sing ten times as loud.

Perkins.—Well, that's something. You get more for your money.

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Hooker.—But it is no credit to them. There were ten times as many singers so they ought to sing ten times as loud.

Enter Dr. Foster. He is a small man, precise and fussy in his manner.

Foster.—Here I am.—Waiting for me, eh?

Perkins.—It is getting kinda late, doc.

Foster.—Sorry I was delayed. But I am sure that you had some stories to fill in time.

Kettleby.—George has just been talking about the choir concerts.

Foster (removing his coat).—He was telling me this morning. I'd like to hear the Beethoven Choir. He said it was the treat of a life time.

Perkins (derisively).—Go on.

Kettleby (surprised).—What?

Foster.—Why, didn't he tell you how exquisite it was?

Perkins.—No, and I bet he didn't tell you that either.

Foster.—Oh yes, he did. Didn't you George?

Hooker (looking a little foolish as he explains).—Kate was with me when I was talking to the doc.

Foster.—Yes. And I'm quite sure that you said what I say you said.

Hooker.—Maybe I did.

Perkins.—Now you had better tell the doc what you really think. Say, listen doc, George says that if one of those girls got into his bedroom at night, he'd jump from the window.

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Foster.—That sounds more like something you would say yourself, Bert.

Hooker.—Let me forget it. . . . If we don't get started soon, it will be time to go home to dinner, and then we won't have a game.

Foster.—That's right. . . . Where are the cards, Kettleby?

Kettleby.—Before we start, I want to tell you fellows something, and I expect to have you back me up.

Perkins.—All right, Kettleby. Is it something with a skirt in it?

Kettleby.—There is a skirt in it, but not the sort you mean. I have been writing an editorial to-day that will wake up this old town when I publish it next week.

Perkins.—Only an editorial. I never read one in my life.

Kettleby (so much in earnest that he ignores the interruption).—I suppose you have heard that Mrs. Sarah Dotleigh Hendershott is going to run for the Town Council in January.

Foster (incredulously).—No.

Kettleby.—Yes.

Hooker.—If Sarah Dotleigh Hendershott runs, she will get in.

Kettleby (in a fighting manner).—Not if I can prevent it. I have been waiting for a long time for a chance to say my say.

Foster.—We know how you feel about that, Kettleby. You have always said that there is too much petticoat rule on this continent.

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Kettleby.—Yes, and it is more true now than when I first told you about it. Every place you go in America, women and women's ideas run the show. Man's world, that used to be so hearty and vulgar and exciting, is getting too prettified, and men are becoming just about as flabby as one of last year's parsnips. I tell you that we are fast ceasing to be men.

Perkins.—I never noticed that I am.

Kettleby.—Shut up, Bert. You are one of the worst of the crowd. You'd be a regular Lothario if it was not for petticoat rule.

Perkins.—Say, listen, Kettleby, if it wasn't for the petticoats, I wouldn't want to be a Lothario.

Hooker.—And what do you propose to do about it, Acres?

Kettleby.—I have written an editorial about man's place and woman's place in the world. I haven't minced matters either. It is straight from the shoulder.

Hooker.—You have often told us that you intended to write some such article sometime.

Kettleby.—And now is the right moment for it. I am going to call it "Man's World". Of course, you have heard the title before. It will be a rallying shout to men, to get together before they have surrendered every privilege that God intended them to possess.

Foster (not very enthusiastic).—You are going to start an awful row, Kettleby. The women won't like it.

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Kettleby.—That is just what I intend. If the men cannot stand a row, they are just as sapless as I think them. I should like to read my editorial to you, but I haven't finished it yet. I'll have it in shape by Friday or Saturday. My theme is that nature intended the male to dominate and every place you go, this is man's world, except on the continent of North America.

Perkins.—That's rubbing it in pretty hard.

Kettleby.—That is just what I mean to do. Look at the young fellows in this town. I told Mary the other day that I'd drown a son of mine if I thought he would grow up into that sort of milk-sop. And that is the result of petticoat rule.

Hooker.—Do you think that the young men are so very different from what they were when we were married?

Kettleby.—You bet they are. Mary tells me that most of the young husbands in this town help their wives wash up the day's dishes when they get home in the evening. What do you think of that? What is the world coming to? Men washing dishes! I never washed a dish for Mary in my life.

Perkins (*always ready for his little joke*).—Ha, ha. That's one on you, doc. (*To the others.*) Last week I dropped over to see the doc, and there he was in the kitchen, clattering round the supper dishes.

Foster (*nettled*).—It was the maid's afternoon out.

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Perkins.—And the best of it was that the Frigate was squatted in her parlour at the piano, singing as though her heart would break.

Foster (getting up, extremely annoyed).—The Frigate? Who do you mean by "The Frigate"? I hope that you are not referring to Mrs. Foster.

Kettleby.—Don't get up on your ear, doc. Don't pretend that you haven't heard folks calling Mrs. Foster the Frigate before now.

Foster (subsiding).—It seems to me that Bert is unnecessarily personal.

Perkins.—I'm sorry, doc. It slipped out.

Foster.—Anyway, I don't do the dishes very often. When the maid's out, we usually go to the hotel.

Kettleby.—After next week's paper appears, I hope people will realize that there are a few real men left, in this community at least, even if you cannot find any more of them in Canada. Women have got all the privileges in this town that men can give them and still retain any self-respect. If my pen has any influence, Mrs. Sarah Dotleigh Hendershott is not going to introduce petticoats into the Town Council.

Hooker.—I'm with you there. I can't stand that woman. She is the capital "C" in the Culture Club in this town.

Kettleby.—I know that I can count on all of you. Don't you think that it is the right time to strike?

Perkins.—You betye. Now, come on and have a game.

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Kettleby.—How about you, doc?

Foster.—You can count on me.

Perkins.—Hold on, doc. Don't make any rash promises.

Kettleby.—And what about yourself, Bert?

Perkins.—I don't mind getting in wrong with the chromos, so long as the good-looking Janes keep coming to the shop.

It has been growing dusk during the scene, and Kettleby now turns on the light.

Kettleby.—That's all I wanted to know. If you fellows agree that this is the time to speak out, then I'm ready to go ahead and start something.

Hooker (opening the drawer of the desk).—Which will it be, bridge or euchre?

Kettleby.—Euchre, I am too worked up to concentrate on bridge.

Hooker takes cards out of drawer and places them on the table. Perkins throws papers that are lying on table in heap on the floor.

Hooker.—Bert, you and I will take on the doc and Kettleby.

Perkins (examining cards).—Say, Kettleby, when are you going to take this pack home and boil it down for soup?

Foster.—You made that joke last week, Bert.

Perkins.—This pack ain't no joke (*shuffling*). I don't believe that I can deal 'em.

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Hooker.--No one asked you to deal. We cut, don't we?

They are seated at the table now and they cut for deal. Dr. Foster wins and starts to deal.

Perkins.—Jake Wilson was in the store to-day. He brought in a good one, pretty ripe too. Say, listen. It's about a travelling man whose motor breaks down near a farm house. The old farmer has two pretty daughters, and one of them comes to the door when the travelling man rings. Says he, "Can you put me up for the night?" And she says "The hired man is away in the city. If you don't mind sleeping in his bed you can stay." And he says, "All right, miss." So he stays. After supper he goes to bed—

While Bert Perkins tells his story their heads get closer together, and

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

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Scene 2.—Thursday afternoon.

The stage is empty when the curtain rises. Everything is the same as at the opening of Scene 1, the papers being back again on the table.

Enter Mrs. Lovey Perkins, a fluttering, foolish little woman, and Mrs. Sarah Dotleigh Hendershott, a dominating well-dressed person.

Mrs. Perkins.—There is nobody in.

Mrs. Hendershott.—Then we'll wait until he comes in.
He cannot have gone home so early in the day, leaving the place all unlocked too.

Mrs. Perkins.—He is very careless that way.

Mrs. Hendershott.—He never struck me as a business-like person. *(She seats herself.)*

Mrs. Perkins (wandering over to the desk).—And this is the place where he does his writing. It must be wonderful to write articles and books.

Mrs. Hendershott.—It is a great power for good or evil.

Mrs. Perkins.—I might have been a writer, for I can think of so many things to say. But I never could spell.

Mrs. Hendershott.—And I suppose his attack on me is in that desk somewhere.

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Mrs. Perkins.—"The pen is mightier than the sword."

When you are in a place like this, doesn't it make you feel what a lovely text that is.

Mrs. Hendershott.—You are sure Mr. Perkins did not say what the attack is going to be about.

Mrs. Perkins (anxiously).—You must not let on to Mr. Kettleby how you heard about the article.

Mrs. Hendershott.—Of course not.

Mrs. Perkins.—Don't forget that Bert told it to me as a secret. It is not supposed to be known until the paper comes out next week. But Bert never keeps anything back in our little chats.

Mrs. Hendershott.—There would be less trouble in the world if all husbands and wives were as candid.

Mrs. Perkins (complacently).—Of course it is easy for my Bert. He never does anything that he is ashamed to tell.

Mrs. Hendershott.—I shall always be grateful to you for coming to me in time, Mrs. Perkins. Now I can stop it. But I cannot imagine what Mr. Kettleby thinks he has got against me.

Mrs. Perkins (examining the pile of papers on the table).—Do editors copy things from other papers? That does not seem to me quite honest.

Mrs. Hendershott (going over and writing with her fingers in the dust on the desk).—This place doesn't look as though they clean it very often.

Mrs. Perkins (working the floor with the toe of her shoe).—And ashes all over the floor. I'm glad my

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Bert doesn't smoke much. He only does it when he is with the other men because, if you don't smoke yourself, it seems to get into your clothes a lot worse. That's strange, isn't it?

Mrs. Hendershott.—I thought I had seen Mr. Perkins smoking.

Mrs. Perkins.—Only for business reasons. Bert gave it up when he got engaged to me. But he says that he can't always be as rigid as he would like.

Mrs. Hendershott (with a great deal more meaning in her tone than Mrs. Perkins perceives).—I see.

Enter Mrs. Mary Kettleby, a home-like person that you take to at once.

Mrs. Kettleby.—Are you waiting for my husband?

Mrs. Hendershott (stiffly).—I am extremely sorry Mrs. Kettleby. But I hear that he is going to make an attack on me in next week's paper.

Mrs. Kettleby.—Mrs. Beacham just ran in to tell me about it half an hour ago.

Mrs. Perkins.—Mrs. Beacham! And she promised me faithfully that she would not tell a soul.

Mrs. Kettleby.—Evidently Mrs. Beacham is not to be trusted to keep a secret.

Mrs. Perkins.—It is lucky I found out in time that she is that sort of a person.

Mrs. Kettleby.—Anyway, I am perfectly sure that there must be some mistake.

Mrs. Hendershott.—I trust so. I shall inform your hus-

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band that if he says anything libellous, my lawyers will take action at once.

Mrs. Kettleby.—I shouldn't tell him that, if I were you, Mrs. Hendershott. Nobody ever got anything by threatening my husband. He is that sort of man. He barks a lot, but he practically never bites.

Mrs. Hendershott.—The whole thing is most mystifying. I cannot understand why Mr. Kettleby should attack me.

Mrs. Perkins.—Bert said—it is rather vulgar what Bert said—that Mr. Kettleby is sour on petticoats.

Mrs. Hendershott.—My record of public activities should have protected me from any such humiliation.

Mrs. Kettleby.—I wonder if you would leave it in my hands, Mrs. Hendershott. I should like to find what is at the root of this queer piece of gossip that Mrs. Perkins has spent the day circulating. *(There is a bite in the final words.)*

Mrs. Perkins.—It is *true*, Mrs. Kettleby. Every word of it is true.

Mrs. Kettleby.—That is what I want Mrs. Hendershott to let me find out.

Mrs. Perkins.—Why, it was right here in this office that they plotted it. My Bert never deceives me. Mr. Kettleby said he was going to attack Mrs. Hendershott, and asked them all to back him up.

Mrs. Hendershott.—The circumstantial evidence seems to support Mrs. Perkins's story. Mrs. Hooker told

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me that the men meet here nearly every evening about five o'clock for a game of cards.

Mrs. Kettleby.—Yes, and when men meet together like that, they often say things that should not be taken too seriously.

Mrs. Hendershott.—But there must have been something said.

Mrs. Kettleby.—That is the reason why I took the trouble to come over here. And I am glad that I saw you in time, Mrs. Hendershott. My husband is the easiest man in the world to get along with, if you trust to his sympathies. But he is a hard man to push.

Mrs. Perkins.—I'd just like to know what goes on at the card games here. I wonder if they have liquor.

Mrs. Kettleby.—Don't think about it. I never do.

Mrs. Perkins.—But I am always suspicious of men when they lock themselves away somewhere so that their wives do not know what they are about.

Mrs. Kettleby.—You are quite wrong, Mrs. Perkins. There is nothing so good for a man as having some quiet place where he can meet together with other men. The poor dears like to strut and blow and stick out their chests and pretend to one another that they are the devilish fellows that their wives know they aren't. Men are just over-grown boys. They have to joke a little and play a little and tell their foolish spicy stories.

Mrs. Perkins (with prudish dignity).—Oh dear, you

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have a terribly low opinion of men, Mrs. Kettleby. I am sure that my Bert is not like that, telling nasty stories and things. It makes me proud to think that my Bert always aims to set a good example to his men friends.

Mrs. Kettleby.—We can only speak of the men we know. And I am quite willing to admit that Bert Perkins and Acres Kettleby are very different sorts of men.

Mrs. Perkins (complacent again).—It is generous of you to admit as much.

Mrs. Kettleby.—I am sure that any man in town would tell you so.

Mrs. Hendershott (ready to make friendly advances).—I have never seen much of you, Mrs. Kettleby.

Mrs. Kettleby.—I am rather a home body, and being Acres Kettleby's wife is a full-sized job for any woman.

Mrs. Hendershott.—But I'd like to know you better. And I am quite willing to leave this business about the editorial entirely in your hands.

Mrs. Kettleby.—Thank you. I don't think you will be sorry.

Enter George Hooker.

Hooker (stopping in surprise).—Good evening, ladies. I expected to find someone else here.

Mrs. Kettleby.—It is all right, Mr. Hooker. Mrs. Hendershott and Mrs. Perkins are just going.

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Mrs. Hendershott.—I am very grateful to you, Mrs. Kettleby.

Mrs. Kettleby.—It is the best way. (*They shake hands.*)

Mrs. Perkins.—Good afternoon. (*They do not shake hands.*)

Mrs. Kettleby.—Good afternoon.

Exit Mrs. Hendershott and Mrs. Perkins.

Hooker (nodding after them).—That woman's tongue hangs in the middle and wags at both ends.

Mrs. Kettleby.—Mrs. Perkins, you mean.

Hooker.—I don't see why Bert blabs everything he knows to her.

Mrs. Kettleby.—Not quite everything.

Hooker (amused in spite of himself).—No, I guess you are right. Not quite everything. But so long as he hands her dirt about everybody else, he seems to be able to make her think him a saint.

Mrs. Kettleby.—Lovey Perkins is a very silly woman.

Hooker.—Lovey Perkins. She flutters about in that baby way, and she'd rather spread scandal than eat. She has been handing Kate an earfull.

Mrs. Kettleby.—About the attack on Mrs. Hendershott?

Hooker.—So Kate has asked me to be home early because the Culture Club is meeting at our place. I never go near the Culture Club. I know she only wants to keep me from having a game of cards here.

Mrs. Kettleby.—I see.

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Hooker.—Of course, Kettleby didn't know that Kate and Sarah Dotleigh Hendershott have been as thick as thieves since they got into the Culture Club together. I am afraid that I'll not be able to back up his stand in the election.

Mrs. Kettleby.—Then he intends to oppose Mrs. Hendershott in the civic elections?

Hooker.—So he says.

Mrs. Kettleby.—And that is his attack on her that they are all talking about?

Hooker.—Yes. Attack is a pretty strong word, but that's that blatherskite Lovey Perkins.

Mrs. Kettleby (making certain of the main point).—Acres does not want Mrs. Hendershott on the Council and told you men so, and that is the cause of all the gossip.

Hooker.—He is writing an editorial next week on the subject. Of course you know how strong he has always been against petticoat government. You must have heard him talk about this being man's world.

Mrs. Kettleby (amused).—That's his favourite hobby.

Hooker.—Well, that's what he is going to write about, man's world.

Mrs. Kettleby (pungently).—It looks like it, doesn't it?

Hooker.—I don't care whose world it is so long as it gives me a living and a game of bridge occasionally.

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Enter Acres Kettleby.

Kettleby.—Hello Mary. I heard you hollering for your game, George. The boys will probably be along soon.

Hooker.—I'm sorry, Acres, but I just ran round to say I can't come to-day.

Kettleby.—What's up? Everybody said yesterday that we would have a game this afternoon.

Hooker (feeling decidedly foolish).—The Culture Club is holding its monthly meeting at our place. Kate asked me at lunch if I'd make an effort to be home.

Kettleby.—The other fellows will be disappointed.

Hooker (so ill at ease that he is glad to break away).—I must be off. Good evening, Mrs. Kettleby.

Mrs. Kettleby.—Good evening.

Exit George Hooker.

Kettleby.—What's the matter with George? He never hoofed off home before to attend a meeting of the Culture Club.

Mrs. Kettleby.—I fancy it means that Kate Hooker does not regard you as a nice little boy for George to play with.

Kettleby.—Kate has become a terrible bore since she turned high-brow.

Mrs. Kettleby.—She always was a ponderous woman, but you notice it more now.

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Kettleby.—Awful hard on poor old George. It's funny how a regular fellow like George lets his wife run him.

Mrs. Kettleby (looking at the top of the desk where Mrs. Hendershott was writing).—I must come over Saturday morning and give this office the once over.

Kettleby.—It is rather dusty.

Mrs. Kettleby (sitting down and speaking casually).—So you have decided that the time has come for you to write your man's world editorial.

Kettleby.—Who told you that?

Mrs. Kettleby.—It's all over the town. I think I was about the last one to hear. That was because Lovey Perkins has never liked me.

Kettleby.—That's a compliment to your good sense.

Mrs. Kettleby.—Of course I like to think of it that way.

Kettleby.—I suppose Bert will not turn up for a game this afternoon either.

Mrs. Kettleby.—Probably not. The difference will be that her Bert will not come round to tell you that he cannot come.

Kettleby.—Another proof that I am right when I say it is time for a halt. If I only succeed in making all the hen-pecked husbands feel cheap I'll have done some good. Man's world. Why our men are not even masculine any more. We might as well take a petticoat to be the flag of this entire continent, and be done with it.

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Mrs. Kettleby (with fond admiration).—I am looking forward to your editorial, dear. I hope that you will not permit the two ideas to become confused so that the main one will be weakened.

Kettleby.—What two ideas?

Mrs. Kettleby.—If people regard it merely as an attack upon Mrs. Sarah Dotleigh Hendershott, they may not grasp the main point of it at all. That would be a pity, when you have been working on the subject for so many years.

Kettleby.—We don't want the old hen sitting on the Town Council.

Mrs. Kettleby.—But it would seem to me that that is an entirely different issue.

Kettleby.—Not at all. I shall make it plain that I am opposing Mrs. Hendershott because she is a woman.

Mrs. Kettleby (doubtfully).—Yes, perhaps that is all right. It wouldn't do to attack her because she is Mrs. Hendershott. She has so many good qualities.

Kettleby (testily).—You don't like her yourself. I know that.

Mrs. Kettleby.—But I admit that she is an excellent organizer and very generous with her money.

Kettleby.—She is an old she-dragon. I bet that Hendershott was glad to die.

Mrs. Kettleby.—She is not a comfortable sort of person. But I do not know anybody, man or woman,

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who has more knowledge of parliamentary procedure.

Kettleby.—That's a fine asset for a woman, now isn't it? If you knew the first rudiments of parliamentary procedure, Mary, I'd divorce you.

Mrs. Kettleby.—Still, a dominating woman can be useful in a town. Look at the success that she made of the hospital. She practically put that institution on its feet.

Kettleby.—You know that she simply had to. It was a case of put up or shut up.

Mrs. Kettleby (in her gentle wondering way).—I do not see that.

Kettleby.—Now Mary, you surely remember how she quarrelled with Mrs. Foster. She forced the Frigate to resign from the Board. Having frozen out the Frigate, she had to make good to justify herself.

Mrs. Kettleby.—Mrs. Foster and Mrs. Hendershott never could get along together. They are both too efficient.

Kettleby (bound to bring matters to a head).—Do you like Mrs. Hendershott or Mrs. Foster?

Mrs. Kettleby.—I am thankful that we have two such useful citizens in the community. But I do not want to see any more than I can help of either one of them.

Kettleby.—What I say in my editorial will apply as much to Mrs. Foster as to Mrs. Hendershott.

MAN'S WORLD

Mrs. Kettleby (as though a little troubled).—But I am afraid, Acres dear, that if your readers think that it is a purely personal editorial, just an attack on Mrs. Hendershott, it will lose most of its effect.

Kettleby (with airy confidence).—Oh. I'll express myself clearly enough.

Mrs. Kettleby.—The trouble is that Lovey Perkins has led them to expect a personal attack.

Kettleby.—Look here, Mary. I don't believe you want me to publish my man's world editorial.

Mrs. Kettleby.—I want people to get the full significance of it.

Kettleby.—Last time I thought of publishing it, you said the issue was too general.

Mrs. Kettleby.—That was when the Government gave the vote to women. You might have seemed a little ridiculous, you know—the only newspaper in Canada to protest.

Kettleby.—Now you want me to draw back when it is a straight issue.

Mrs. Kettleby.—I am afraid it is too personal. Your idea is a general one you know.

Kettleby.—But I have declared myself pretty emphatically.

Mrs. Kettleby.—Really, I shouldn't be interfering. I can trust your judgment, Acres. You always do look on all sides of a question.

Kettleby.—I do wish that Lovey Perkins had not garbled the facts.

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Mrs. Kettleby.—It makes everything rather awkward (*pensively*). I'd hate the editorial to be misunderstood.

Kettleby (angrily).—That woman is a public nuisance.

Mrs. Kettleby.—Wouldn't it be funny to leave her high and dry? If you did not publish the attack on Mrs. Hendershott, think of all the explanations that she would have to make.

Kettleby.—But I told you that it is not an attack on Mrs. Hendershott. It is an attack on petticoat government.

Mrs. Kettleby.—The whole town would think that you referred to Mrs. Hendershott as petticoat government. . . . Wouldn't I love to see Lovey Perkins flat on her back.

Kettleby.—If I didn't publish that editorial, everybody would say I got cold feet.

Mrs. Kettleby.—Oh no. It will only strengthen the popular impression that you cannot believe a word that Lovey Perkins says.

Kettleby (in doubt).—But the men—

Mrs. Kettleby.—George Hooker will be glad enough to tell Kate that you never intended to abuse Sarah Dotleigh Hendershott. . . . As for Bert Perkins, you know what everybody thinks of Bert Perkins.

Kettleby (loyal to a friend).—Bert Perkins is quite a good scout.

Mrs. Kettleby.—We won't quarrel about him, dear. You don't like Lovey. Don't ask me to like Bert.

MAN'S WORLD

Kettleby.—But hang it all, Mary. I don't want to see Sarah Dotleigh Hendershott on the Town Council.

Mrs. Kettleby.—Neither do I. But if you publish that editorial now, the women will flock round her, and she'll win hands down.

Kettleby.—I'd feel like a quitter, Mary. I would be a quitter.

Mrs. Kettleby (getting up and preparing to go).—Oh well, Acres, I know you will think it all over and do what is best. . . . I always have such perfect faith that you will not do the wrong thing.

Kettleby (pleased with himself).—I might as well stroll home with you, Mary. There will be no one in this afternoon.

Mrs. Kettleby.—Then come along dear (*pausing at the door*). But there is somebody in the outer office now.

Kettleby.—Why it is Dr. Foster.

Enter Dr. Foster.

Kettleby.—Hello doc, what's the row?

Mrs. Kettleby.—Good evening, doctor.

Foster.—Good evening, Mrs. Kettleby. We don't often see you here.

Mrs. Kettleby.—Acres and I were just leaving for home.

Foster.—No cards to-night, Kettleby?

Kettleby.—Nobody turned up. I wasn't expecting you.

Foster.—It has been a pretty exciting day for me.

Mrs. Kettleby.—The whole town seems to be excited.

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Foster (*with considerable warmth*).—That blabbing Lovey Perkins.

Kettleby.—I suppose she has been over to see Mrs. Foster. She didn't miss a soul.

Foster.—If she is a sample petticoat, then I am right with you Kettleby. I don't see why Bert doesn't lock her up until she gets some sense.

Kettleby.—You can reassure Mrs. Foster when you go home. Mrs. Perkins has been entirely mistaken in her information.

Foster.—And you are not going to roast Mrs. Hendershott?

Kettleby.—That was just Lovey Perkins's version of it.

Foster.—But aren't you? Things have been just boiling round our place since Mrs. Foster heard that Mrs. Hendershott was going to run for the Town Council and that you are going to go after her.

Kettleby.—You were right, Mary. I will say this for the petticoats, that they all stick together.

Foster.—Stick together nothing. . . . Mrs. Foster has decided to run against her.

CURTAIN.

MAN'S WORLD

Scene 3.—Friday.

It is evening and the lights are on. George Hooker, Bert Perkins and Acres Kettleby are discovered. It is quite evident that peace has been restored. Perkins and Hooker are seated, smoking, and Kettleby is moving about the room.

Hooker.—Say fellows, I feel that I can enjoy a game to-night. Isn't the doc going to show up?

Kettleby.—Perhaps not.

Hooker.—What is the matter now?

Kettleby.—Don't you know that the Frigate has thrown her hat into the ring? She is going to oppose Sarah Dotleigh Hendershott.

Perkins.—Is that right?

Kettleby.—She hasn't announced it yet. But the news ought to be getting round town.

Perkins.—I wasn't home to lunch. Probably Lovey would have heard.

Hooker.—I don't see why the doc stands for the Frigate's activities. She is always fighting with some one.

Perkins.—Perhaps he is tickled to death when the some one ain't him.

Hooker.—He certainly needs a little more back-bone. If he would give her an argument just once or twice, things would be much smother.

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Kettleby.—After all, George, you do a lot of things to please Kate.

Hooker.—Kate is not like the Frigate. She never makes me look like a fool.

Perkins.—Say, listen, wouldn't it be a joke if they both get elected? There would be a little life in the Town Council then.

Kettleby.—You don't seem to take the Town Council very seriously, Bert. It is not a vaudeville show.

Perkins.—When the Frigate and Mammy Hendershott go to the mat, you will have something to write about for a change, Acres. Say, listen, when they get started on election day, Lovey won't know which to back.

Hooker.—Tell her to play both of them for show, and she'll make a killing.

Perkins.—Hold on, George, Lovey doesn't think I know any racing phrases.

Enter Dr. Foster.

Foster (removing his overcoat).—Sorry fellows. I have had a busy day. Mrs. Foster has gone into politics.

Kettleby.—You look all in, doc. I'll get you a bracer.

Perkins (smacking his lips).—George and I are all in too.

Kettleby (getting a bottle from behind some books).—Hand out the glasses, George.

Hooker sets out four glasses, which they fill and drink.

MAN'S WORLD

Foster.—I spent all last night at Steve Thompson's. Their first baby, you know.

Perkins.—A he or a she?

Foster.—A boy. . . . The poor little woman had a pretty bad time. Thought I wouldn't pull her through.

Hooker (immediately waxing sympathetic and sentimental, as is the way with his kind).—Steve Thompson is a nice boy. It seems only yesterday that he was a baby himself.

Foster.—He's a sensitive fellow. It is quite a while since I last saw a young daddy make such a fuss.

Hooker.—Why didn't you chase him out? . . . Make him go over to his mother's?

Foster.—I felt so sorry for him. You see I have heard young fellows talk like that before,—if I remember rightly, you did it yourself, George,—about nature being unfair and the wife having so much more to suffer than the husband.

Kettleby.—I'll say this for you, doc, you have the patience of Job. I'd have told him to quit talking like a fool, and pretty quick too.

Foster.—I'll admit that I felt sort of irritable last night.

Hooker.—Wouldn't it be great to see the doc when he is irritable.

Foster.—But I was kind to the poor boy. I didn't say what was in my mind.

Perkins.—Tell us, doc, what did you want to say?

Foster.—I came mighty near telling him that it isn't

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always the wife who has the most to bear. He isn't married to the Frigate.

The others laugh.

Hooker.—Let's forget the election. We're here to have a game of cards.

Foster.—I've a fat chance to forget about the election for the next two months.

Hooker (getting the cards from the desk drawer).—Here is the bridge pack.

Foster.—And I hope you'll excuse me. . . . I should not have made that rude speech about Mrs. Foster just now.

Kettleby.—Didn't I tell you what would happen when we gave the women a vote. . . . But you wouldn't listen to me.

Perkins.—A vote never worried me. I haven't voted for ten years, not since the novelty wore off.

Kettleby.—You should be ashamed to tell it, Bert.

Perkins.—I'd sooner hear a good story than have a vote any old time. Banty Jones was in the store to-day. He told me one about a girl in a pullman car. It was a pretty ripe one. Say, listen.—

Foster.—Hold on a moment, Bert, till we get settled.

They cut for partners. Kettleby and Dr. Foster play together. All sit down, with Kettleby facing the audience, and cut for deal. It is Acres Kettleby who wins out, and as he deals he is off on his hobby again.

MAN'S WORLD

Kettleby.—Do you know, fellows, I can't help thinking about what the doc has been telling us about Steve Thompson. The young fellows of to-day are going to seed. That's the effect of too much petticoat. Forty years ago, men did not act that way. They were hard pioneer stuff in those days. They knew men's place, and they knew women's place too. Imagine husbands washing dishes, and crying because they cannot bear the babies. It's a bad sign. It's abnormal, I tell you. That article of mine has got to be written one of these days. *Man's World*. . . . These things that go round in pants and call themselves men need to be given a jolt. They need to be told that they are tied to their wives' apron strings—

While Kettleby is still blathering

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

THE BASKET
A Drama

CHARACTERS:

PETER MCNAIRN, An elderly man.

MIRIAM CARRILLO, His daughter.

CARLOS CARRILLO, Her husband.

A STRANGE WOMAN.

THE BASKET

Scene.—The living room in a prosperous Canadian log-house in the 80's of the last century. There is a door at the back which leads into a lean-to porch and doors going to right and left to other rooms. The windows are deep set. The room gets its heat from an old-fashioned base-burner stove, which glows in the darkness. A small bench occupies the centre of the stage well forward, in a conspicuous position. There is a small table at one side of the room, with a comfortable rocker between it and the stove, and a larger table at the other side of the stage, covered by a red cloth.

The action takes place on a November evening. The room is gloomy. It is lighted by two lamps, one of them on the small table. That one is lighted when the curtain rises, and the other, on the larger table is lighted later on.

Before the curtain rises, a man dressed in the rugged tweeds worn by Canadian gentlemen farmers of forty years ago comes before the curtain. He recites:

Out in the dark of the night

A cry, agonized, shrill;

Silent and black stand the forms in the pale gray light,

Breathless, shuddering, still.

Daybreak at last,

Light lifts only the fears that light can explain;

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The horror that haunts us through the long hours is cast
By meanings we seek in vain.

A frightened child at the door of a darkened room;
Hours that are spent waiting for death alone;
A heart benumbed under a sense of doom,—
The terror of things unknown.

Give us more answers; kindle a brighter light;
Frantic voices ask the eternal 'Why?'
Still, no response. Out in the dark of the night,
A cry.

THE CURTAIN RISES.

Miriam Carrillo is seated in the rocking chair in the half darkened room. She is sewing by the light of the lamp on the small table. There is a green shade over it. Her natural beauty is disguised by her heavy working clothes. As she bends over her sewing, she looks more than the thirty-five years of her age. Her manner is nervous and has the suggestion of being constantly fearful. She knows that something is bound to happen that she has long struggled to prevent.

Peter McNairn enters through the door at the back. He is a powerful man, intolerant and grim. He wears the clothes of a farmer and has a lantern in his hand.

THE BASKET

Peter (*pausing on the threshold and calling*).—*Miriam*.

Miriam.—Yes father.

Peter.—I didn't see you there. I thought you would be in the kitchen.

Miriam.—It is more than an hour to supper time. These November evenings close in early.

Peter.—It has been a gloomy day. It was most dark at four o'clock. I wish the snow ud come. It would make the road brighter, and the wind couldn't be much colder. . . . It's a raw night.

Miriam.—If you feel chilled I can hurry the kitchen fire and get you something warm to drink.

Peter.—No. . . . No, no. I'll go out and look round the barn first. I guess I'll find that Carlos did not do a single chore to-day.

Miriam.—I'm afraid that he has been away most of the afternoon.

Peter.—You needn't tell me that. I know Carlos. As soon as I left, he left.

Miriam.—It wasn't so very long after dinner.

Peter.—He didn't tell you where he was going, did he? I suppose he hasn't told you what he has been doing with himself lately.

Miriam.—I haven't asked him, father. . . . At least he has been keeping away from the drink. We know that.

Peter.—Because he has found some other form of excitement.

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Miriam (anxiously).—Is he down in the village?

Peter.—It was down in the village that I saw him. The Plyms or the Shakers or one of those gangs are holding forth on the market square, a revival, I should think from the din.

Miriam (incredulous).—But Carlos wouldn't be there. He doesn't care anything about religion.

Peter.—Yes he was, in the very centre of it all, beside himself, pouring out a story of his past life that would make your ears blush.

Miriam.—You saw him, yourself?

Peter.—I was with one of the other elders from our church. We stood and watched from the edge of the crowd.

Miriam.—Perhaps religion has touched him. He has heard you pray for him often enough, to save his soul from among the damned.

Peter.—And he only laughed.

Miriam.—It was a little trying, father. You must see that.

Peter.—So now he thinks that he can humiliate Peter McNairn. I crept away in shame.

Miriam.—Remember last year, father. This new thing is better than what he was doing then.

Peter.—You did not see the crowd laughing at him. They don't take much stock in Mad Carlos getting religion. They know he'll change to-morrow if the notion takes him. So they just stand round and snicker.

THE BASKET

Miriam.—But wasn't it worse that day at the county fair, two years ago?

Peter.—When the drunken fool drove his team like a runaway round the race course?

Miriam.—That was the most terrible day Carlos has ever given us.

Peter.—People expected that of him. This new craze is just a mockery.

Miriam.—We shouldn't be incensed because he has got religion.

Peter.—He makes a scandal of everything that he touches. He makes a scandal of religion.

Miriam.—It is hard for you father. People round here have always esteemed you so highly. Perhaps we had better go away.

Peter.—I could not do without you, Miriam. . . . It was a bad day for the McNairns when your aunt Josephine took you gallivanting to the end of the world, or wherever it was that you found Carlos Carrillo.

Miriam.—What is the use of going over all that again? We have learned a lot in ten years.

Peter.—I did not need ten years to tell me. I knew it as soon as my eyes fell on him, a vagrant from the tents of Kedar.

Miriam.—I should never have come back here.

Peter.—What else could you do, with me here alone and needing you?

Miriam.—It is this country that has made him so un-

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strung. You know that. You and I—we are not the kind that Carlos knows.

Peter.—And what is his kind?

Miriam (*realizing while she is speaking that it means everything to her but nothing to her father*).—Out of the South he came, this man of mine.

Peter.—Out of the South, where the sun has bred maggots in his brain.

Miriam.—Out of the South, where his blood was warmed. . . . And here, what has he found on this little farm in Kimount Township? Cold, suspicious, gossiping people, tattling to and fro all day long.

Peter.—He has given them plenty of opportunity. . . . No pretty girl was safe in Kimount when he first came.

Miriam.—That is not so. . . . The people here, they say and they say and they say.

Peter.—And only you refuse to believe.

Miriam.—No one else can understand. We are frigid northern creatures.

Peter.—But he says he is English, for all he calls himself by that outlandish name.

Miriam.—It is my name too.

Peter.—And that Spanish skin and voice, and that Indian hair. I tell you, daughter, he comes to us from generations of unbridled sin.

Miriam.—I am going into the kitchen. Carlos is my husband, and I won't listen to you talk so.

THE BASKET

Peter.—The taint is in him, I tell you, so he leaves his work undone while he goes seeking scandal up and down the country side.

There is a knock at the door.

Miriam (turning back).—There, what is that?

Peter.—It's a knock.

Miriam.—Who can be coming a-visiting at such an hour on such an evening?

Peter.—You go, see who it is. I'll take a turn through the stable.

Peter goes out through kitchen door to the left. Miriam removes her apron, pats her hair and opens the door at the back. A woman enters and walks to the centre of the room. She is wearing a heavy, shabby dress that must once have been a showy and costly street gown. Over her head and partly enveloping her, she has an Oriental shawl. The effect is bizarre. In her arms she carries a covered Indian basket, securely strapped and tied.

Miriam.—Do you want anything?

Woman.—Is this the house of Peter McNairn?

Miriam.—Yes.

Woman.—Ah. . . . It is dark in here. Can we have more light?

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Miriam lights the lamp on the other table. The woman walks to the centre of the stage and places the basket on the bench.

Miriam.—Is there anything that I can do for you?

Woman.—I wanted a brighter light so that I could get a good look at you.

Miriam.—Why me?

Woman.—You are Peter McNairn's daughter? You are Mrs. Carlos Carrillo?

Miriam.—That's who I am.

Woman.—I want to see the woman whom Carlos Carrillo followed into this backwater of the world.

Miriam.—Are you a friend of my husband?

Woman.—I used to know him long before he was that half-baked scarecrow of a man that I saw an hour ago ranting to the people in the village.

Miriam.—How did you get here?

Woman.—It was hard enough, after I left the last sickly light in the village and started stumbling along the country roads. And that is the way he gets home now. No wonder he has gone crazed.

Miriam.—But you haven't told me your name.

Woman.—What does that matter?

Miriam.—Perhaps I have heard him speak of you.

Woman.—I do not think so. . . . Aren't there some people you have known whose names you never mention?

Miriam.—Where did you know my husband? In England?

THE BASKET

Woman.—What does that matter either? In England? Yes, but England is so small and colourless. There were Cairo and Calcutta. . . . This basket came from India.

Miriam.—Don't you want to see my husband?

Woman.—Not now, I saw him in the village. After that I only wanted to see the woman who had made the new Carlos Carrillo.

Miriam.—I cannot understand why you have come here, all this way, for nothing.

Woman.—Oh no. Not for nothing.

Miriam.—I wish you hadn't come. This is a cruel neighbourhood. Your coming will give them cause to talk. They build such great stories on such small incidents.

Woman.—Tell me where you married Carlos Carrillo.

Miriam.—In South America. He was ill. I was a nurse and seemed almost like one of his own country-women.

Woman.—It was romance again, romance and mystery. He wanted to see this cold north land where women learn to be so calm.

Miriam.—I am not so calm.

Woman.—I can see the difference that he saw.

Miriam.—Carlos wanted to get away from everything.

Woman (lifting the basket).—But there are things that he cannot bury in a forgotten past.

Miriam.—You have not come here to make trouble? You said that you did not want to see him.

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Woman.—I only want him to get this basket, this basket from India. He will remember it.

Miriam.—You want to leave it here?

Woman.—In your keeping, to give to him. But you must not open it.

Miriam.—No. Oh no.

Woman.—No one except Carlos Carrillo—only Carlos Carrillo must open this basket.

Miriam.—But you are undoing the straps.

Woman.—Don't come near. . . .

Miriam.—But what?

The woman lifts the cover of the basket and looks in. With unspeakable terror in every movement, she slams it down again. She fastens the straps with trembling hands, as though it might suddenly burst open. When the basket is firmly bound, the woman sinks down exhausted.

Woman (her voice low and intense).—Why did I do it? Why did I do it?

Miriam.—You are all shaken.

Woman.—I knew. . . . I knew that I should never again loosen that strap. . . . Oh. . . .

(She droops in a half faint.)

Miriam.—Can I—? *(She looks about helplessly. Then brings the woman a glass of water from the table.)* Are you better now?

THE BASKET

*Woman (half rises to her feet, then falls back again weakly).—*Oh God. . . . Oh God.

*Miriam.—*You are ill. . . . There is no doctor nearer than the village.

*Woman.—*I'll be all right in a moment. I must be all right. I must get away.

*Miriam.—*You are trembling (*stretching her hand towards the basket*). What was it?

*Woman (rising to her feet).—*No, I am not ill. . . . Haven't you ever known fear—the sort of terror that freezes up the marrow? (*More like herself again.*) See, it is passing.

*Miriam.—*But you cannot go out in the dark in your nervous condition.

*Woman (picking up her shawl and rolling it round herself).—*I should not have opened it, but I did, so I cannot stay.

The woman goes to the door.

*Miriam.—*I have no lantern that I can lend you.

*Woman.—*Do you think that a little darkness would have any terrors for me now?

*Miriam.—*I do not know what you mean.

*Woman.—*Heaven grant you never will!

The woman goes out through the door at the back. Miriam holds the lamp for her and then returns it to the table. She looks towards the basket and crosses the room, giving it a wide

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berth. She pauses, turns back, determined not to be afraid, and goes up to it.

Miriam (as she stands looking down at the basket.—
How can it contain so much danger or evil?

Enter Carlos through door from kitchen, at left. He is a strangely pallid man, with black straight hair, rather long. His frame is stooped and contracted, as though he lacked vitality. He is carrying a lantern, still lighted.

*Carlos (catching the last word).—*Evil. . . . I hear that word everywhere in this country. There are only two things here, ugly things and evil things.

*Miriam.—*Carlos. . . . Oh, I wish that you had been here sooner.

*Carlos.—*What for, witch? (*He speaks affectionately.*)

*Miriam.—*There has been a strange woman here. At first I did not want you to see her. Now I wish that you had.

*Carlos.—*Where is she?

*Miriam.—*She started back to the village.

*Carlos.—*Back to the village, a stranger going back to the village to-night without a light?

*Miriam.—*She found her way out here, just to bring that.

*Carlos (seeing the basket for the first time).—*Oh. (*He says the word very slowly and stands perfectly still for a moment.*) She brought it, after all these years.

THE BASKET

Miriam.—Then you know who it was?

Carlos (eagerly).—Has she gone long? Could I overtake her?

Miriam.—Yes, easily, in the dark, and you with a lantern.

Carlos (stopping).—But no, I cannot have her see me. She might not even know me now.

Miriam.—You are not so greatly altered as you think.

Carlos.—You never knew me as she would remember me.

Miriam.—But if she is your friend, it isn't safe to have her wandering out there in the dark along the edge of the marshes.

Carlos.—She is safe enough. She is more of a witch than you are. You brought me back from the dead. She came back to me from the dead.

Miriam.—There never was a woman like her in this house before. I am glad that father did not meet her. He would have talked Old Testament at her.

Carlos (contemplatively).—So she brought the basket.

Miriam.—You know what it is?

Carlos.—She said that no one must open it but Carlos Carrillo?

Miriam.—Yes. . . . How did you guess that?

Carlos.—Of course. That is what she would say.

Miriam.—She must have some terrible reason to hate you.

Carlos.—That basket in a place like this.

Miriam.—You are not going to open it, Carlos? You cannot know what it contains.

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Carlos.—Who can know what the basket holds who has not looked into it for himself?

Carlos commences to unstrap the basket.

Miriam.—*Carlos.* . . . Don't.

Miriam crosses room to door at right as though to make her escape. She turns back, watching while Carlos continues to unfasten the straps. He lifts the cover, and looks in. There is a pause, and then Carlos throws back his head like one who has taken a long draught of exhilarating wine. He expands visibly, and loses his broken, helpless look. Finally he is standing up vigorously, like a new person.

Carlos (radiant with the joy of living).—To think that there are so many wonderful things to do in all the world, and I have stayed here.

Miriam.—What has happened, Carlos? What do you mean?

Carlos (as though suffering a relapse into his recent religious ecstasy).—For ten years I have been in a bad dream, in which there was no light or life or laughter. . . . To-day, down in the village was a hundred years ago.

Miriam.—The basket. . . . Let me see what you have seen in the basket.

Carlos (barring her way).—The basket was only for me.

Miriam.—But I don't understand. How can it be?

THE BASKET

*Carlos (fastening the straps).—*To-morrow, when I am gone, I want you to throw it in the marsh, where it will go down forever.

*Miriam.—*Where are you going?

*Carlos.—*I am going to get away before this place settles down and crushes my will again.

*Miriam.—*And what of me?

*Carlos.—*Your world is not my world, and my world is not your world.

*Miriam.—*It hasn't been all so unhappy, Carlos. You know that it has not been all so unhappy.

*Carlos.—*Oh, you witch. But we had better forget this wild experiment that we should never have tried.

*Miriam (with sultry intensity).—*Who is that woman?

*Carlos.—*I am not following her, Miriam.

*Miriam.—*You are going where she is.

*Carlos.—*I hope not. Perhaps she has walked into the quick sands. What an end it would be for her. She has drunk champagne in every capital in Europe. Now to die with her mouth full of dirty water in an Ontario swamp.

*Miriam.—*Don't. It is a horrible idea.

Enter Peter at left.

*Peter (to Carlos).—*So you have come home. You have made us all ridiculous enough for one day, I hope.

*Carlos.—*It was for the last time, Peter McNairn.

*Peter.—*Does that mean that you are going to do a little to earn your keep round here, now and then?

ONE THIRD OF A BILL

Carlos.—No. . . . It means that I am going to find places where there are no November nights.

Peter (with contempt).—You are beside yourself from your antics in the village. . . . Or have you been drinking again?

Carlos.—You think that anyone who does not love squalor must be beside himself. . . . Don't you know when a man is trying to say a friendly good-bye to you, Peter McNairn?

Peter.—And where do you think you are going?

Carlos.—Perhaps I am going to find music.

Peter.—The voices of sin.

Carlos.—And perhaps I am going to a land where there is fragrance.

Peter.—Talk sense. . . . I can see your nose is twitching for the fragrance of harlots in a brothel.

Miriam.—You have no right to say such beastly things, father.

Peter (scornfully).—A man crying for fragrance. What does a man want with fragrance?

Carlos.—I suppose you think that the proper fragrance to satisfy a man is found in the barns out there—dung?

Carlos has opened a chest in the corner of the room, and he takes from it a long cloak, which he throws round himself. He makes an incongruous figure when he picks up his lantern.

THE BASKET

Miriam.—Carlos. . . . You are not going to leave me here, Carlos?

Peter.—Would you risk yourself with a madman?

Carlos.—For once you are right, Peter McNairn. It would have been better if Miriam and I had never met.

Peter.—It is black as death outside.

Carlos.—I shall take this lantern, but I'll leave it at the station. Never as long as I live will I be any place again where they need a lantern. Lanterns belong here.

Peter (pointing to the basket).—Is that heathenish thing yours?

Carlos.—Just to be rid of me, will you make me one last promise, Peter McNairn?

Peter.—There is not much hope that we'll be rid of you.

Carlos.—As soon as it is dawn to-morrow, take that basket and throw it into the marsh. Its work is done.

Peter.—Take the thing with you.

Carlos.—I can't do that. I want it to be sunk where no human being will ever handle it again.

Miriam.—Have you bound it tight?

Carlos.—Yes, and it must never be unfastened. Will you throw it into the marsh for me, Peter McNairn?

Peter.—It is a small favour, and I'll do it.

Carlos.—It is a greater favour than you can know. Look at me, haven't I changed since this morning?

ONE THIRD OF A BILL

Peter.—You will come back here when your humour changes, to loaf and to eat. Your kind never leaves.

Carlos.—Miriam knows that I have changed. That is why she does not try to stop me.

Carlos crosses the room and gathers Miriam in his arms for a farewell kiss. It is like the embrace of lovers. When he leaves her, Miriam sinks into a chair.

Carlos (opening the door and looking out into the darkness).—This will be the last time that I'll go through a door and plunge into blackness. I am going to places where they know how to defeat the night.

Exit Carlos.

Peter.—This is some new game that he is playing? Have you any idea what he's after?

Miriam.—It is not a game. Can't you see that he is as young as when he came here first.

Peter.—He can always count on you to side with him. I believe you know when he wants. . . . How could he grow young here?

Miriam.—No one can hope to grow young here.

Peter.—He is only play-acting. That's a certainty.

Miriam.—It was the basket.

Peter.—What about the basket?

THE BASKET

Miriam.—He looked into it. And then I saw in a moment that I was powerless to hold him.

Peter (going to the basket).—I'll see what's in it.

Miriam.—No, no, you must not do that. You promised him that you would throw it into the marsh.

Peter.—I made no promise not to open it.

Miriam.—He said that no human being must ever unfasten the straps again. He said that it had finished its work. I am sure he meant that you and I must not see what it contains.

Peter.—And that is the reason why I shall open it.

Miriam.—If you had seen what I have seen.

Peter.—I am not afraid.

He has unfastened the straps. Now he lifts the cover of the basket and looks in. He stands with his hands aloft, gazing into it with his face grim and set.

Miriam (at last).—Father. . . . Father.

Peter (not heeding her).—Grant us thy strength, Jehovah, in this, the hour of our testing.

Miriam (after another moment, moving towards him).—Father.

Peter (waving her back, but not looking towards her).—
Oh God, avert from this house Thy wrath that may justly come upon us.

He closes and fastens the basket.

Miriam.—I told you. I told you not to do it.

ONE THIRD OF A BILL

Peter.—It is best that I should have done what I have done.

Miriam.—Am I to be the only one that must not know?

Peter.—There are things in this world, my daughter, so unspeakable that they pale the imaginings of man.

Miriam.—Then you will throw it into the marsh?

Peter.—At the first streak of dawn.

Miriam.—You put me to one side as though the basket meant nothing to me.

Peter.—Go to your room and pray. That is all women are good for.

Miriam.—Do you think that a woman who lives in the house with you, father, could have any prayers left?

Peter.—Silence, I want no more of the flippancies of Carlos.

Miriam goes to pick up the lamp.

Peter.—Don't touch that lamp. We cannot leave this room in darkness to-night.

Exit Miriam at right.

Peter (standing behind the basket and speaking with the zeal of a very minor prophet).—Woe unto us. For unto this house, where we have known the blessing of righteousness, the hour has come in which the blessing is turned into a curse. What can a man do into whose life has come an abomination that makes everything utterly cor-

THE BASKET

rupt? Can he bring an offering that will remove the defilement from him? Can tears and much weeping wipe out such iniquity?

Exit Peter at left.

The door of Miriam's room opens, and she enters. She looks furtively towards Peter's door, but there is no movement. Miriam goes softly to the basket and unfastens it. She lifts the cover and looks in.

Miriam (under her breath).—What?

She gets the lamp and carries it to the bench, so as to have a better light when she lifts the cover and looks again.

Miriam.—And the thing that they could not tell me is—

As she speaks, her amusement swells into laughter, which swallows up the final words, and she is rocking in uncontrollable mirth as

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

The man comes before the curtain and repeats,—

Out in the dark of the night

A cry, agonized, shrill;

Silent and black stand the forms in the pale gray light,

Breathless, shuddering, still.

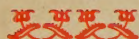
ONE THIRD OF A BILL

Daybreak at last.

Light lifts only the fears that light can explain;
The horror that haunts us through the long hours is cast
By meanings we seek in vain.

A frightened child, at the door of a darkened room;
Hours that are spent waiting for death alone;
A heart benumbed under a sense of doom,—
The terror of things unknown.

Give us more answers; kindle a brighter light;
Frantic voices ask the eternal why?
Still, no response. Out in the dark of the night,
A cry.



**ONE
THIRD
OF A BILL**

**FIVE SHORT
CANADIAN
PLAYS**

JACOB





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